

A Second Chance

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After the Rumbling, Eren believed that whatever waited for him in the afterlife was suffering for what he did. Instead, he woke up in a new world that he has no place in. With no history, his desperation leads him on a dark path, but a young mother of two reborn children might be the second chance he feels he doesn't deserve. Focusses on PTSD and survivor's guilt.

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Lost in a New World

Chapter 1: Lost in a New World

Eren opened his eyes for what felt like the first time in a long time. He felt as if he woke up from a dreamless sleep and was unable to remember much of what happened before he fell asleep. His head was throbbing, and he realized that he felt cold. His feet were beginning to feel numb, and he could feel his body shivering.

The last thing Eren remembered was running towards his brother Zeke. Reiner and the Marleyan advance force were trying to prevent him from coming into contact with his brother and beginning the Rumbling. As he ran and saw Zeke outstretch his hand, he began to struggle to remember what happened after that. There were flashes, but he was unsure of exactly what happened. Almost like he fell asleep right as he reached Zeke.

He looked at his surroundings and guessed that he was in some kind of alleyway. It didn't look familiar to him since he knew most of the areas in Shiganshina. Even with the improvements and renovations that were made, Eren still knew every bit of the landscape of his place of birth.

Looking around though, he realized that the area he was in was different. The buildings looked taller than they should, and he heard weird noises coming from out on the street. They sounded similar to dozens of Marleyan vehicles but somehow different at the same time.

Was he in Marley? Did the Rumbling succeed?

Suddenly flashes of memories appeared in his mind. Memories of the hundreds of millions of people that he crushed under the feet of

tens of millions of Titans. Eren leaned over to the side and vomited as the memories rushed back to him.

Since he was in the paths, Eren saw everything that he did. He remembered that boy, Ramzi, as he was crushed under a Titan while he and his brother were trapped by debris. He saw his grandparents, people he never really cared for, crushed as the prison they were trapped in collapsed on top of them. He saw Hange burst into flames as she fell from the heat generated by the Titans.

"I... I succeeded..." Eren said to himself in shock.

Exactly as he saw in his father's memories. Every single detail was completely clear to him. Every crying child. Every mother crushed. Every friend who gave their lives trying to run or fight.

Eren dragged himself over to a wall in the alley and laid back against it. Unable to fully support himself in his sitting position as the weight of his actions finally began to crush him. So many dead. So many lives snuffed out.

Was it worth it? Was everything he did worth so much pain and destruction? Was it worth snuffing the lives of so many innocent people?

Eren always pushed forward. He knew, the moment he kissed Historia's hand, that he would cause the greatest genocide the world would ever know. All so he could protect the island of Paradis and ensure that his friends can live long and happy lives.

Eren drew his knees up to his chest as he held his head in his hands. He was barely aware that the clothes he was currently wearing was what he fought in Shiganshina in. His dirty old shirt and pants that were torn above the knees when the Jaws bit his legs off. That was probably why he was cold.

But he barely felt the cold. He felt completely numb to everything around him. The only thing he could think about was what he was

made to do. The choices he made that lead to near complete genocide of the world beyond the sea.

Eren couldn't help but imagine ending his life right then after what he did. He didn't deserve to spend his remaining four years alive after what he did.

But how was he alive? He remembered opening his eyes and seeing Mikasa cut his head off. He remembered dying as she kissed his severed head and the warmth it brought him as he slowly faded into oblivion. Then, he was here.

But where is here?

Eren still felt numb from the internal struggle he was having with himself, but he willed his body to move. His mind was desperate to think of anything but the past few days that he spent in the paths. Days that felt like literal years as he commanded the Titans with the Founder Ymir.

He stood up and felt cold from what he assumed was a chilly autumn or spring night. He could see thanks to the lights in the alley but was unsure of where he was. It didn't look like Marley, and if he remembered from his father's memories, 80% of the world should be nothing but rubble that had cooled to ash after the Titans went past.

Eren exited the alley and was met with a strange sight.

"M-Mikasa?" He stuttered as a woman walked by him.

She didn't pay him any attention, but he could tell she wasn't Mikasa. He only imagined it since she had very similar features to Mikasa. The woman had the look of one of the Hizuru women that he met when they met with the Azumabito. Mikasa, although her family came from Hizuru, still had Eldian features since some members of her family were Eldian.

As he looked around, his eyes struggled to adjust to the light hitting his eyes. Although it was likely the middle of the night, he felt as if he was blinded from all the lights around him. It was as if the city was made of millions of tiny suns, each of various colors.

The buildings around him were massive. So large that he couldn't tell how high they went. A small part of him imagined using his ODM gear to soar through the city. The roads were massive too. There seemed to be two types, one where people would walk and others where vehicles would move. And there were a lot of vehicles. There was no possible way that these vehicles were from Hizuru. Marley was the most technologically advanced nation and even they didn't have so many.

"Where am I?" He asked himself.

Was it possible Eren was in the afterlife? There was no other explanation. He knew for a fact that no city looked like this, and even if they did, there's no way they'd still be in such good condition. He simply couldn't be in Hizuru.

Eren then noticed the people talking. They were speaking in a language that he recognized as Hizuru. While he spent little time with the Azumabito, he did learn some words and was able to point out the language. However, he was completely illiterate and was unable to understand anyone who was speaking as they passed by him.

The signs were also in a different language. He couldn't read anything. He was completely lost and confused.

Suddenly, he heard someone speak behind him and turned to face him. It was a man who was dressed in a blue suit with a blue vest and what looked to be a Navy hat from Marley. Eren couldn't understand him at all.

"What?" He asked.

"Oh, you speak English?" The man asked in a heavy accent.

English? What was that?

The concept of different languages was new to anyone who lived on Paradis Island. Everyone spoke the same language and never even had a name for it. When they learned the truth of their world, they either called the language Eldian or Marleyan. Of course, in schools before they learned the truth, they knew humanity was diverse before the titans, but it was still such a strange thing for them to learn.

So they call this language English?

"Where am I?" Eren asked.

"Listen, you can't get drunk in public like that and walk around like you're homeless." The man said with an annoyed expression. "Can I see your passport? Maybe I can help you."

"My passport?" Eren asked, not understanding what he was talking about.

"Did you lose it?" The man asked. "I can help you to an embassy, but I need to know what nationality you are."

"Where am I?" Eren tried again.

"You're in Tokyo." The man replied.

"What is that?" Eren asked again.

"Man, did you really get that drunk?" The man in blue shook his head. "Tokyo, you know, the capital city of Japan?" He tried to explain.

"I don't know those words." Eren said.

"Come on, we need to get you to the station and let you get some rest." He said, approaching Eren. "When you're not drunk and in some warm clothes, we can see about getting you where you need to be."

As the man approached Eren, his fight or flight instincts kicked in. He didn't know where the man wanted to take him but didn't want to find out. Especially if he learned that he was an Eldian.

"Hey! Wait!" That man yelled as Eren ran away from him and into the crowd.

While Eren wasn't as acrobatic as Captain Levi or Mikasa, he was still able to effortlessly move through the large crowd without losing any speed.

After several minutes Eren was sure he escaped from the man. The man was unable to navigate the crowd in order to find him and would be unable to reach Eren. Eren turned into another alleyway and sat down behind a dumpster in order to ensure that he would be hidden.

Eren went through the knowledge he gained from the man. Japan? Was that a country, or a province of Hizuru? He had no idea where he was and no idea how to go home. He was in an unfamiliar land that didn't speak his language as a primary one and he couldn't even read.

That man also asked for a "Passport". what was that? Was it similar to Eldian papers? Did he suspect Eren of being an Eldian? Nothing about this made sense.

The adrenalin from the chase began to wear off, and Eren was beginning to feel exhausted again. He knew he needed to sleep but also knew he'd freeze to death if he didn't get warm. Luckily, there was a blanket in the dumpster next to him. It wasn't ideal by any means, but he was used to sleeping in filth. Especially when he posed as an Eldian Soldier during the war in the Mid East.

He laid down on the hard cold ground and closed his eyes, forcing himself to sleep. The blanket was pretty heavy and quickly warmed him up. It wasn't comfortable, but it would be ok for now.

Eren sat on a park bench a few miles away from where he woke up. The sun was out and there were so many people on the road that he was getting a bit uncomfortable. There are so many people here. He thought he saw a lot of people when they went to Marley for the first time, but there were so many people that he thought this small area had more people than the total population of Paradis.

He managed to get some clothes from the same dumpster that he fished the blanket from. He wore a large hoodie that was too big for him as well as a pair of gray sweatpants that had holes around the knees. He got some weird black shoes that had a very soft sole on the bottom and was luckily close to his size. It was a little bigger than his actual shoe size, but it would work for now.

In the time he went to the park bench, he asked people again where he was. Most people walked faster as he approached, especially since he did look like he was homeless. Of the people who did talk with him, none understood him and would hold their arms in an X fashion to say they don't understand him. However, some people did understand what he was saying and could speak his language, though most weren't as good as the man in blue.

They confirmed the same thing though. He's on an Island called Japan, in the capital city of Tokyo. It's an Island off the mainland of Asia, which itself is one of many large Regions in this world.

That's when he learned that for some reason, he wasn't in his own world. He was in a completely new world that had no connection to his own. He tried questioning people on countries like Hizuru or Marley. He even asked if they know of Eldia or the threat of the Titans. Most people looked at him as if he was crazy.

"So, I survived." Eren said out loud to himself. "And not only that, I'm in another world."

It was crazy to think, but compared to everything else he saw, it didn't seem too crazy. Between the paths, the ability to send memories through time, and even the very nature of the Titans, maybe it wasn't so strange. Who knows how the paths worked.

That brought him to another strange thing. His finger was currently bleeding after he intentionally cut it. He tested to see if he still had the power of a Titan Shifter. Since he was unable to heal the small cut, he confirmed that he no longer had his powers. If he remembered, the source of the power was destroyed when his friends killed the source after it felt his Founding Titan.

Did that mean the curse was lifted as well? Would he still die in four years, or would he continue to live a long and natural life?

"You have a chance to live..." He said slowly as he looked at his hands. "A chance to do something new. You and no one else. How fortunate." He said with an almost sarcastic tone.

Why did he get to live when he caused so much death and destruction? Why him and not Hange? Did she go to a new world? Is she somewhere out there, making a mess of herself or crying that the world she's in doesn't have Titans to study? He almost smiled at the thought.

It was unfair that he alone is allowed to be here, when there were so many people more deserving of it. It wouldn't be right for him to be happy here after everything he did. He deserved nothing less than the worse possible afterlife imaginable. The sins he committed was simply too great for him to accept anything less.

"Regardless of how I feel, I need to keep moving forward." He said to himself more than anything else. He needed to keep moving forward, no matter what.

He needed income, some way to make money so he can afford to basic essentials. Food, shelter, and clothes being the primary things. It shouldn't be too hard. Eren had no real skills, but there are many jobs back on Paradis and even Marley that require little to no skill. He needed something before he could use his skills.

One primary thought he had was farming. Even as a Soldier he still needed to farm. Military units fed themselves by what they could produce on their own. While they could buy from merchants, it was simply easier and cheaper for them to farm their own food right outside their bases. So Eren did have a lot of experience caring for animals and harvesting crops.

However, he didn't know where any farmland was. He walked for a while and still saw nothing but city all around him.

Another thought is working for a merchant or store. He may not be able to communicate much, but he can move boxes or supplies around with ease. Even children in the walls would work to support their families stores or go out to work in order to add additional income to the family.

Eren would need to do something to get money before he thought about what do do next.

After several hours, Eren came to another small store that sold different kind of foods that seemed to be packaged. He couldn't read the signs but he hope this place would be good.

Eren tried to speak with several places, but most would turn him away for being homeless or was unable to speak in his language. One person he asked on the street said this "Convenience store" had a person that spoke good English. Maybe this person could let him work there.

He entered the store and saw a woman, maybe a few years older than him, working at the desk. She saw him and looked concerned at

first but smiled regardless.

"Welcome." She said in Eren's native tongue, immediately recognizing him as a foreigner. "Can we help you?" She asked.

"I'm looking for a job." Eren said to her.

"A job?" She tilted her head. "No offense, but we don't exactly higher people who don't take interviews seriously." She said, looking at his state of dress.

"I don't have anything else." Eren replied.

"You're homeless?" She asked.

"Yes." Eren said truthfully, unable to hide how desperate his situation is.

"Well, I'm the manager here so I could probably hirer you." She said, which gave Eren hope. "What's your name?" She asked.

"Eren Yeager." He said, having no need to hide his name.

"Yeager huh?" She asked. "Are you German?"

"German?" Eren asked, unfamiliar with the term.

"Sorry, I figured you would be. I took German in University. Yeager means Hunter in German." She pointed out.

"I didn't know that." Eren said honestly.

"Well, it is interesting." She laughed. "Ok, so what can you do?" She asked, referring to his skills.

"I can't do much." Eren said.

"Can you speak or read Japanese?" She asked.

"No." Eren replied.

She looked sad as he said that.

"Why are you here than? How'd you get into Japan if you're homeless and have no understanding of our language?" It was a valid question.

A question that Eren couldn't answer. His situation was crazy, even for him, so he knew she wouldn't believe him.

"Guess the silence means you don't want to talk about it." She said sadly.

The girls rubbed the back of her head as she thought on what he could do.

"Well, you might be able to help clean the store. I could maybe hire you as a janitor." She said.

"I can do that." Eren said.

"Ok, no problem, I have an English employment form that you can fill out." She said as she reached under the desk and handed Eren a piece of paper.

Eren looked at the paperwork and it was just as alien to him as Japanese was. English had completely different symbols than Eldian or Marleyan. There were no similarities. The words were just as strange to him as Japanese.

"What's wrong Yeager-San?" She asked when she noticed he wasn't writing anything.

"I... I can't read this." He struggled to say.

" *Nani?* " She said a word that Eren couldn't understand. "How can't you read this?" She asked in surprise. "Your English sounds perfect, did you never learn how to read or write?"

Eren looked away as she said that, not knowing what he should say in this situation. The girl sighed and tried again.

"Ok, maybe I can fill it out for you. All I need is some form of identification." She said.

"Identification?" Eren asked, which caused her to raise her eyebrow again.

"Yea, you know, an ID? Or a Passport." There was that word again. "Even an immigration card. Do you have any actual papers proving who you are?" She asked.

"No." Eren said, causing the girl to sigh.

"I'm sorry, but I can't hire you." She said sadly.

"Why not?" Eren asked.

"What kind of question is that?" She placed her head in her hand and shook it. "You have no identification. Did you come here illegally?" She asked.

Eren said nothing, again not sure how to answer that question. Unfortunately, the girl took it as confirmation.

"Listen, technically I have to report this to the authorities if you're here illegally." She said. "But I don't want to do that, so I'll pretend I didn't ask. But I can't hire you. If it's found out I'm employing an illegal foreigner, then not only will the owner fire me but I could get into legal troubles myself." She said.

"I understand." Eren said with a sigh.

"I'm really sorry, but there's nothing I can do." She apologized. "The only thing I can say is go to your country's embassy and let them help you. They can at least get you home or maybe help you with a visa and passport."

Eren appreciated the help, but he knew it was fruitless. He had no embassy, and even then, those words are not familiar to him. Marley had embassies, but he never heard of passports or a visa.

"I will." Eren lied, if for no other reason than to not give the girl a reason to call for authorities.

"Be careful, ok?" She said, hoping that Eren would be safe and find some help.

"I will." He said as he left the store.

Eren sat in another alleyway after getting another blanket from the dumpster. After the girl rejected his chance for a job, Eren didn't know what to do. There were so many things about this world that made it nearly impossible for him to live. Things that prove his identification? Was everyone required to have one? Only Eldians were required to have papers when leaving internment zones, but apparently everyone here had one.

Everything around him was completely alien to him. Strange little boxes that people talked into or played with, massive windows that displayed moving pictures, he even saw flying machine in the sky from time to time. It looked similar to the flying boat that they had before the Rumbling, but probably much bigger.

Eren not only lacked skills outside of fighting, but he also was illiterate in this world and could only speak a language that a fraction of the people here can comprehend. He had no idea how he was going to survive in this world.

"Maybe this is what I deserve." Eren said to himself as he looked up at the sky as the sun was setting. "After what I did, I deserve to live this way... right?" He asked himself.

He did terrible things in the name of Eldia. He caused a genocide greater than what was thought possible for his friends to live. He felt

disgust as the thought of being disappointed that the world thrived. No matter how he looked at it, he killed too many people to even consider that he could have a happy ending.

"You look like sorry sight." Eren heard a strange accent that was completely new to him.

Eren stood up and looked over in the alley at the voice.

"Come boy, don't have to worry." The man said in his heavy accent.

He wore a trench coat of some kind. It looked like it was made from heavy wool and covered the man from his neck to his knees. He had silver hair that was slicked back and a beard that was the same color. He had wrinkles on his face, and Eren guessed he was maybe in his 40s or 50s.

"Who are you?" Eren asked the man.

"Just business man, want to talk wit you." He said.

"What's your name?" Eren asked.

"Name is Sergei, and I can see you're desperate." The man said. "I can give job, if interested."

Eren really considered it. This man was offering employment, but he knew that it was risky to suddenly take offerings from complete strangers.

"You were at the store." Eren said.

The man, Sergei, raised an eyebrow.

"You saw me?" Sergei asked.

"No." Eren said. "But you wouldn't come up to some homeless man for no reason." Sergei laughed at that.

"Da, I saw you in store and heard issue." He said. "I need good man for job."

"You need someone desperate for a crime." Eren said, causing the man to smile.

"For being illiterate, you are smart." Sergei remarked.

"I'm not illiterate." Eren said. "I just don't know these languages."

"Sure kid." He said.

"What is it that you want me to do?" Eren asked in frustration.

"I move things kid." Sergei said. "I move them from place to place. Move from Russia and Asia, into Souther and Latin America. Sometimes other way."

"What do you move?" Eren asked. He may be desperate, but there are certain things he'd refuse to do.

"Weapons." Sergei said.

"You're an arms trafficker?" Eren asked.

When he was in the Mid East, he heard a lot of stories of men who would traffic illegal weapons from the war effort to place into the hands of criminals, soldiers, or revolutionaries. As well funded as Marley was, they had a lot of logistical issues that caused shortages of weapons for their Army. Especially when the Navy would lose control of their sea routes.

While Eren wasn't there for long, he experienced the issues with a lack of weapons and equipment for the Eldian Battalions.

"Da, I am." Sergei said. "Only traffic in arms though. Just need people to help move things. It's easy and gives good money."

Eren knew how risky that would be. Getting in league with criminals had its fair share of issues, especially for someone that doesn't want to bring attention to himself. One wrong move and his simple illegal immigration can turn into being hanged.

But after all the sins he committed, was arms trafficking so bad? Ideally, he wouldn't need to kill anyone. He was desperate for money and desperate for some kind of job.

"Here." Sergei gave Eren a stack of paper that he guessed was the local currency here. "20,000 Yen, enough for new clothes and night in hotel." He said.

"You expect me to pay this back?" Eren asked.

"No, I don't manipulate." Sergei said, surprising Eren.

"Then why give me this?" Eren asked.

"Investment." Sergei said. "You can't get good work and have no proof of identity. You can't live or survive unless on streets. So, I know you'll come to me."

Eren knew he was right. He was desperate enough to consider it.

"I give money now, you get taste, and want more. Not manipulation, only taste of what I give." Sergei said. "If you decide you don't want work, don't pay it back. But you get no further money without my help."

Eren looked down at the stack of bills in his hand. 20,000 yen he said. Was that a lot? Eren had no concept for how much that was. He said it's enough for hotel and clothes, so it's probably a relatively decent amount. Not enough to survive off of, but enough for a day of basic shopping.

"You win Sergei." Eren said.

"There's hotel down street, look for purple sign. It takes customers with no identification." Sergei said. "I'll pick you up at noon tomorrow for first job. Do good, and you'll make good money."

Sergei walked away from Eren and disappeared into the crowd when he got onto the street.

Eren nodded at that. He knew that Sergei picked him due to Eren's own desperation. He doesn't need anyone skilled or smart for what he needs Eren for. Just someone desperate enough to take orders and potentially be expendable. Sadly, Eren had no choice.

He went to the Hotel first to pay for a night there. He needed new clothes but he wanted to make sure he got the hotel first so he didn't waste the money on too many clothes.

After he paid for it, he went to a nearby mall. Even though it was dark, most of the malls were still open. They were filled with teenagers in weird uniforms that were going around in their own groups to buy things or spend time together. Eren had no idea why so many of them wore uniforms, but he didn't think too much on it. He went to what looked like the cheapest department store he could kind.

He tried on some basic clothes. A lot of the clothing looked weird to him. They looked like they had designs printed all over them in some way. Eren had no idea how they were made, since they felt like a picture was glued to it instead of being sowed on.

In the end, he purchased a pair of blue pants that were made of a rough material, two pairs of gray shirts, a black hoodie that fit him, and a pair of simple boots. He barely had enough money, but he figured he might still have enough to get something to eat.

He put the clothes in a weird bag that was given to him. The bad was thin and made out of a material that felt unnatural. It made a lot of noise as it was moved around, but he didn't focus on that. Right now, his main concern was food.

The food was odd to him. He got a small bowl of noodles which he remembered was similar to food served at the Azumabito embassy. The food was weird, but he appreciated that there was meat in the bowl. He couldn't tell if this was a cheap meal exactly, but he luckily had enough money.

Eren made his way back to the hotel to get some rest. He entered the room which was on the first floor and was kind of shocked at the inside. There was what looked like a big black mirror on a shelf and a large bed that looked comfortable to sleep on.

Eren stripped down and got into the shower. The first time he took a shower was in Marley, since Paradis only had baths for bathing due to their lack of technology at the time. It took him a while to figure out how to use the shower, but it was similar enough.

Eren dressed in his outfit, minus the hoodie and boots, and laid down in the bed. It was much softer than any bed he felt before. He almost felt like he was sinking into it.

This world was strange. The technology was far greater than he could imagine. Paradis was already at least 100 years behind Marley, so he was used to the shock of new technology. He guessed this world was maybe 100 years ahead of Marley, but he had no idea how to actually judge that.

Eren fell asleep, hoping to get some good rest now that he was clean and not in the cold.

"Keep moving forward." Eren said to himself as he looked at the ceiling. "Just keep moving forward." He said again before falling asleep.

Hoshino Ai was sitting in her apartment complex watching a movie with her two children, Aqua and Ruby. She was dressed in a simple t-shirt, a pair of skinny jeans, and socks. She was almost ready to

put the kids to bed, but they wanted to stay awake to finish the movie.

She didn't really know much about it. It was some kind of superhero movie from America with subtitles, though Aqua said he wanted to watch it. Well over three-years-old and her baby boy already had already shown an interest in superheroes. She shouldn't be surprised; boys did tend to gravitate towards those kinds of things. She of course had to double check the rating to make sure it would be good for a three-year-old to watch. She allowed him to watch it, but she laughed when he pouted at the thought of her censoring it.

She could already feel his rebellious phase coming. It scared her but excited her. Both her children were ridiculously smart and able to speak in full sentences after just a single year of being alive. She knew that they had a bright future ahead of them if they decided to study hard.

Maybe Aqua would be a Doctor or a Lawyer. Ruby was just as intelligent so maybe she would be the same. Or maybe she'd want to follow in her footsteps as an idol.

She smiled at what they would be like when they grow up and couldn't wait to see it. Although, she'd want them to stay as kids for at least a little while.

"Ok you two, time for bed." Ai said when the movie finished.

"But it has an after credits." Aqua complained, though complained wasn't exactly the right word.

Unlike most kids that would probably give an attitude, he said it as if he was talking to a friend of his instead of a mother who enforces a strict bedtime.

"We can watch it tomorrow." Ai said. "I already let you stay up ten minutes passed your bedtime. So you need rest."

"Aw! Come on!" Ruby cried, or at least tried to.

Ai smiled at her attempt. She knew enough that those were fake tears to get sympathy, but it wouldn't work on her. Ruby, unlike Aqua, acted a bit closer to her age. She was just as intelligent, but also so needy for her attention. Aqua was more independent, but he seemed mentally older than he should. She always chalked it up to him being technically the older sibling and so he fell into the older sibling role.

"Ruby, you need sleep." Ai said firmly but softly.

"Fine." Ruby sighed; her tears already gone.

Ai went into the bedroom and unrolled the Futon. She got out of her clothes quickly and put on a pair of pajamas by the time her children came in.

"You two sleep well for mama, ok?" She asked as she smiled at them.

"Ok." Both of them said in unison, though Ruby was still disappointed.

" *I love you.* " Ai thought to herself but didn't say it out loud.

" *What?* " She thought again. For her, love was a lie. If she said it enough times, maybe she would believe it. She never loved anyone in her life before, so the thought of loving her children was foreign to her.

She always suppressed the thought because of how devastating it would be if she were to say it out loud and to realize it was a lie. Such a thought would destroy her.

" *Just don't think about it.* " She mentally said to herself. " *Just go to sleep.* " She said.

She put her head on the pillow and felt Ruby cuddle into her chest. Aqua kept his distance, already showing independence from his

mama. Ai smiled at the thought of her little boy trying already to be a man.

Regardless of how she felt, her children were the cutest little things in the world, and no one can say otherwise.

So here's a new story. I was so upset at how Episode 1 of Oshi No Ko ended (Though it is a great show), so I wanted to kind of give a happier, yet still dramatic take.

Why a crossover with Attack of Titan? Why not? Main reason was that I wanted to have a character with a dark past that focusses on elements of PTSD, survivors' guilt, and depression. I debated on whether to make Eren a third kid, but decided to just make him an adult because I felt it would be more interesting.

I like the idea of Eren being a complete fish out of water and having to deal with the desperation of living in a digital world with absolutely no history. As far as people are concerned, he's a westerner with no ID, no Passport, and doesn't exist. It's impossible for him to find legitimate employment so he has to be desperate.

It also focusses on the ideas of how Soldiers with no transferable skills struggle to live in a new environment. How many can turn to crime or alcohol since they have no way to find good employment.

Overall, this story will focus on not only the dark side of being an idol, but depression, PTSD, and survivor's guilt.

Please review. It helps a lot. Thanks

First Day on the Job

Chapter 2: First Day on the Job

Eren looked at himself in the mirror as he finished washing his face. He was looking rough, even with the shower and the warm meal last night. His shirt was off as he wet his hair and put it in a bun to keep it out of his eyes.

It was almost noon, and Eren needed to finish getting ready for Sergei to arrive to the Hotel. Eren felt tired still, especially with all the thoughts that plagued his mind, but he knew he needed to focus on the job at hand.

Fight... just fight...

Eren thought to himself, but the words refused to come from his mouth. He felt tired and couldn't bring himself to speak.

"Keep moving forward." Eren said to himself instead. "Just keep moving... forward." He said again, struggling a bit more.

He heard the door open behind him and looked to see a young Hizuru, or rather Japanese woman, walk into the room. When she saw Eren she made a high pitch squeal at the surprise, bowing over and over, repeating something that Eren assumed was an apology.

Eren didn't mind her since he was told that he needed to leave by noon, so they already had a cleaning crew. He put on one of his shirts and put the other in the bag he had from the store. Then he put on his hoodie, making sure to put the hood up to better hide his face. He brushed past the girl who had a blush on her face.

Eren walked down to the lobby and out the door, where he saw Sergei waiting for him next to a black vehicle. He had a white stick in his mouth which Eren recognized as a Marleyan cigarette.

"There you are kid." Sergei waved at him. "Get in, we've got a long drive ahead of us." Sergei said.

Eren got into the left door of the vehicle and marveled at the technology around him. He saw the inside of a few Marleyan vehicles, but they were crude levers and wheels compared to the precision of the Japanese vehicle.

"Drive will be on western coast of Japan, where we'll get weapons." Sergei said as he got into the driver's seat and started the vehicle.

"Where is it going?" Eren asked.

"New guys don't ask questions." Sergei said, eyeing Eren. "You prove yourself, I'll let you know details. Until then we need to know you're not rat."

Eren shrugged at that, not really caring much about it since he only needed some money until he found a better way to survive. He was desperate, but he's not going to be invested in a lifestyle like this.

"You want fast food?" Sergei asked. Eren shrugged.

Sergei pulled up to a yellow and orange building that had some kind of communicator or radio on the outside. After speaking in Japanese, he pulled up to a window down the small trail. Eren noticed his accent was very poor since even he could tell the difference in quality between a native Japanese speaker and Sergei.

"Dig in." He said, taking out what looked like a really greasy sandwich with beef. "These are best." He said.

"What is it?" Eren asked.

"It's cheeseburger." Sergei replied as he bit into it. "In my country, I got to try it when they opened first one in Moscow. It was best I ever had, much better than our food."

"Moscow?" Eren asked.

"Capital of Soviet Union, though it's called Russia now." Sergei explained. "You really are dumb." He chuckled, which annoyed Eren.

Eren took a bite out of it. He had no doubt that if Sasha was here, she would cry in delight at the flavor and seasoning. It tasted like what Nicolo would serve them. His whole life he always had bland beef, and after the fall of wall Maria, meat became extremely rare. He couldn't tell the spices that were used. Eren's only way to season meat going up was to use salt, which was extremely expensive and even his father's pay as a doctor wasn't enough to consistently buy it.

"Good no?" Sergei asked.

"Yea, it tastes good." Eren said in a low tone.

"Western food is some of best. I never liked Japanese food, but it's much healthier than western food." Sergei laughed.

After eating in the car, Sergei had Eren throw away the trash and started the drive to their destination.

It was a long drive to their destination. It was already dark by the time they reached it. The speed was amazing to Eren. It was hard to say, but he figured it was around the same speed as a full throttle ODM movement. He couldn't really judge it since there's a fine line between being in a vehicle and soaring through the air.

They were deep in the forest by this point, driving down winding roads that were almost impossible to see without the bright lights at the front of the vehicle. Eren guessed it was a new moon since he couldn't make out any natural light at all. Since they were transporting illegal weapon, Eren figured they chose this date for the darkness it would bring.

They pulled up to a small clearing off the side of the road. In the center was a small van that had a few people around it. Aside from how strange it was that a group of people were standing in the

middle of a clearing at night, there was no immediate things that made them look suspicious. However, Eren had no doubt that they were likely carrying some weapons.

Sergei got out of the car and walked over to the men. Eren noticed they looked Japanese but had subtle features that made them different. There were six in total around the van. On the ground were a few boxes that Eren guessed were the weapons.

Sergei went up to him and spoke in a language Eren didn't recognize. He heard Hizuru enough to recognize the sounds, but this was different. He could tell he wasn't speaking in Japanese. One man replied back, also in the same new language that Eren couldn't distinguish.

The leader of the group motioned for one man to open up the crates, showing weapons that Eren was unfamiliar with.

Sergei took out a notebook and started writing some information down as he looked over it. Most of them were pistols that he didn't recognize, as well as some longer ones that still looked much shorter than a Marleyan Rifle.

After nodding at what he saw, Sergei motioned for them to load it up into the van.

Sergei mentioned for Eren to get back into the car and started driving off.

They began driving back onto the road with the van following close behind. Eren kept quiet, not asking any questions. He knew Sergei would say nothing even if he did, so he kept his mouth shut. It seemed like things were going too easy.

Sergie slowed the car down as he noticed that there were two cars blocking the small country road.

"What's wrong?" Eren asked. "You know them?"

"No, they're not part of the route." Sergei said. "We'll need to turn arou-" Sergei was cut off.

Suddenly the glass exploded in front of them, followed by loud bangs. Eren, as if by pure instinct, kneeled down as much as he could in the seat so as to hopefully avoid being shot. Sergei did the same, just barely missing the bullets as they hit near them.

" *Der'mo!* " Sergei cursed in what Eren assumed was his native tongue.

"Who are they?" Eren asked.

"Might be a Yakuza group." Sergei assumed.

"Yakuza?" Eren asked.

"They are the big players in this country and looks like they want an easy score." Sergei said. He took out a pistol from his jacket, one Eren wasn't familiar with. "Keep your head down, we'll get them when they-" Sergei was cut off again as a Yakuza member walked up to their window with a pistol, intent on killing them.

Eren noticed that there was another pistol in Sergeis coat from the angle he was at. Eren quickly reached into his coat and grabbed it. He hoped it was ready to fire since he didn't know how to operate it, so he pointed it at the Yakuza and fired.

The man fell down after taking a few shots to the chest and face. Eren knew he needed to move fast otherwise they would die. He opened his door and slid out, trying to remain as close to the ground as possible.

After hearing a slight pause in the shooting, Eren sprinted into the tree line, hoping to get some cover from the trees as he made his way to the blockade. Eren sprinted along the tree line, ensuring to stay within visual sight of the road so that he could still see thanks to the lights from the cars.

Once he was close, he ran out of the tree line and started shooting one handed at the men.

Although Eren wasn't as good as many other Scout members in ODM, he was still one of the best in the Survey Corp. He spent years after reclaiming the walls learning how to combine ODM and Marleyan pistols, just like the rest of his comrades. He was extremely accurate while on the move and was most comfortable firing one handed.

That's why the moment he sprinted out of the tree line, all the Yakuza members were dead.

Eren stepped back as Sergei drove through the two vehicles blocking their path, creating a hole and stopping in front of Eren.

"Get in kid!" He yelled. Eren got into the passenger side of the vehicle again and went as fast as he could while the van stayed close behind.

"I don't have ammo." Eren said calmly.

Sergei reached into his coat again and pulled out what looked like magazines. They were small and Eren never saw magazines used for pistols. He saw magazines for machine guns and even some small rifles, but never a pistol.

Eren grabbed the magazines and put them in his pocket. He started looking at the pistol to see where they were kept. He noticed a button near his thumb and pressed it, watching as a magazine in the grip was pushed out. He threw it out of the grip and put a new one in. He heard a click and was sure it was fully in there. The top of the gun was open, so he assumed it was the same as a Marleyan pistol and pulled it back slightly, watching as the top of the gun slammed forward and loaded a new bullet.

"There's more guys!" Sergei said, watching as there were Yakuza men coming out of the tree line ahead of them, hoping to try and hit

them.

Eren stuck half his body out of the window and started to shoot. He was still using it one handed and could confirm that Sergei was going about as fast as his old ODM gear. He smiled at the thought, since as smooth as the vehicle was, Eren was able to easily line up his shots.

As they drove past, most of the Yakuza men died from Eren's precise aim. Most were hit in either the head or the chest, so Eren was able to quickly incapacitate them, even if they could later heal from their injuries.

Once they drove past that group, they didn't see any more men. It looked like they were in the clear. Sergei breathed a sigh of relief as the fighting was over.

Eren looked at the gun again, still confused at what exactly it was. It had an interesting design to it and apparently kept the bullets in the grip instead of in front like a Marleyan pistol.

"I'm impressed kid." Sergei said.

"Thought I couldn't handle myself?" Eren asked.

"Yea actually, otherwise you would have been armed from the start." He said in a matter of fact tone.

Eren shrugged since he didn't much care for the older man's opinion. He wasn't here to get on anyone's good side, just get paid.

"Normally I test guys out on small jobs. See if they are willing to do job without morals getting in way." Sergei said. "I didn't expect fight, but I'm glad you can do what needs to be done."

"I'll take that as a compliment." Eren said.

"Where'd you learn that?" Sergei asked. "No man I met can use gun like that. Not that fast or that accurate."

"It's not that hard." Eren shrugged off, not wanting to talk about his past.

"I can tell you had training. Former Soldier probably." Sergei wondered out loud. "You're illiterate so can't be US Soldier, standards are too high. Maybe French Foreign Legion?"

"No." Eren said again.

"Oh well, won't push personal things." Sergei shrugged. "Though you're good with gun. Dumb, but skilled."

Eren started to get annoyed at being called dumb. He was literate, while he wasn't Armin, he still did well during his days at the Cadet Corp in academics.

"Here." Sergei said, handing him some money.

"Already?" Eren asked.

"You deserve it, you did good." Sergei said. "I was originally planning to pay you 50,000 Yen for first job, but you did good. That's 200,000 Yen, good for one month for most people."

"I appreciate it." Eren said, pocketing the money.

"I recommend you learn numbers, so people don't give you less when they realize you're dumb." He said, pointing at the symbols on the corners of the bills. Eren assumed that they were the numbers.

"Thanks." Eren said, annoyed at being called dumb again.

There was a long silence that followed, mostly because Eren and Sergei were focused on the road in order to make sure there were no more surprises. Eren had to squint his eyes as the wind started hitting his eyes due to the lack of glass on the front of the vehicle.

"We're moving guns to Tokyo." Sergei said.

"Thought you didn't trust me." Eren said.

"I trust you enough to involve." Sergei said. "Safe to say, I'd be dead. You're not undercover law since you wouldn't fight like that. So you can know."

"What are they for?" Eren asked.

"Chinese spies in city, trying to spy on government.' He said. "That's why they're all pistols, though some of the rifles are for some gangs."

"They need guns, the spies I mean?" Eren asked.

"Chinese government work with gangs in Tokyo, need protection." Sergei said. "I ask few questions, so I don't know full details." He said.

"So you sell to everyone?" Eren asked.

"One of best traffickers in country. Difficult to move arms around. Doesn't matter if rivals buy from me. They all need me, though some get a little dumb." He said while mentioning the now dead Yakuza members they left behind.

"Do you only traffic arms?" Eren asked, worried about the prospect of being involved in slavery.

"Sometimes smuggle people, but not slaves." Sergei clarified. "Human merchandise is not good for image. Though moving spies and gangs members are." Sergei said.

"Hard to imagine you have morals." Eren said, making Sergei laugh.

"Morals, I have no morals." He said. "Dealing in people is bad for business. One escaped person and whole operation is ruined. Most people you higher in those games can't think enough to hid face, so after a while the entire thing goes away when police get involved."

Eren could tell those were half-truths. The best lies are the ones with a bit of truth to it. Then again, Eren had no room to talk. Even if Sergei did work in human trafficking, he'd still be a saint to a crime like genocide.

Eren relaxed a bit after another round of silence followed. He stayed focused in case there were more people but was feeling a bit better.

Next Morning

"Mama! I want ice cream!" Ruby yelled in the store, causing Ai to shush her.

"Don't worry Ruby-Chan, we'll get you some, but you need to be quiet while we're out." She smiled lovingly at her daughter.

They were doing some quick grocery shopping, so Ai was dressed in her normal disguise. Her long hair was in a ponytail and hidden under a hat while her eyes were covered by large sunglasses. She opted to wear a medical mask today since the air quality was a little bad due to the news reporting higher levels of Smog. Additionally, yellow dust was starting to be a problem again since the near winter months, sand from Mongolia ends up being blown through China and into Korea and Japan. There was no visual haze yet, but she wanted to ensure the safety of her and her children's lungs.

She was currently pushing a stroller that held both children while her arm had a basket with various foods she got. They were waiting in line for their turn to pay.

"Can you please keep it on Ruby-Chan?" Ai asked her daughter.

"I don't like it Mama." She complained.

She always seemed to have an unusual aversion to medical masks. Ai read about why online and mostly she learned that sometimes kids have the most unusual habits and tolerances. Sometimes kids

can get uncomfortable if the wind is hitting them, especially at such a young age.

"It's not so bad Ruby." Aqua said as he got annoyed at his sister.

Aqua was playing with Ai's phone that she let him use while they were in line. She assumed he was just bored when he asked to borrow it, so she let him. She wondered if he was watching YouTube or something.

Aqua was much better at wearing it. She heard young kids complain no matter what when anything is on their face, but he seemed comfortable with it on.

"I-I just don't like it." She said sadly.

The sorrow in her voice almost broke Ai's heart. She didn't know why, but she sounded so genuine. This wasn't her normal pouty face when she wanted something. I was like there was some specific reason she doesn't like having one on.

"How about we get you a better mask." Ai said, looking at the masks near the register. They were still medical masks, but they had cute and fun designs on them.

"Ok." Ruby conceded.

"That's my good girl." Ai smiled, pinching her daughter's cheeks gently, causing her to wine a bit.

After paying for the food, Ai packaged it up in the cloth bags she brought from home. She needed to save money and it helped not having to pay for plastic bags since most stores give discounts if you bring your own bag. One of the many ways Japan was trying to prevent waste.

She walked out with the kids to a car that was waiting for them.

"Thanks for the drive Miyako-San." Ai greeted the wife of her Company's President.

She would help Ai drive around when she needed to get things for the apartment or for the children in order to try and keep Ai outside the public eye as much as possible. This ensured that she kept her identity and whereabouts safe from stalkers.

"No problem." She dismissed. She always was annoyed when she had to do this but started to grow to care about the young woman and her twins.

Ai packed the stroller into the trunk of the car as she got her children into the backseat. She always rode in the back with them when they were out together so that she could spend more time with them.

"Ah, that feels so good." She sighed when she took the mask off. She felt like she was able to breath a bit better again now that she was in the car and there was better air quality.

"At least the masks help protect your identity." Miyako-San commented.

"If the air quality was bad every day, then I wouldn't need you to drive me." She giggled.

"Do you think anyone saw you?" She asked.

"No, at least no one recognized me." She confirmed.

"Mama was super sneaky." Ruby said excitedly.

"Yup, we were like spies." She laughed, continuing her daughter's joke.

"Yea, minus the stupid mask." She said sadly.

Ai noticed it again. She still didn't know why her daughter would get sad from wearing a mask. She could understand a child being

annoyed, but this wasn't normal. At least based on what she read. It was like something happened to make wearing a mask something traumatic for her.

"Well don't worry." Ai smiled. "I got you a super fun one." She pulled out another mask. It was a medical mask again, but it had a cute design of an anime character that Ruby would sometimes watch.

"Meh." Ruby said in annoyance. "I'll take it, but I won't like it." She huffed, taking the mask.

Ai laughed a bit at her display. At least that felt normal compared to her down casted look.

Her eyes wandered over to her son on her right, who was still playing with her phone. He looked so focused and intense when he stared at the phone.

His eyes were so intense, like he was much older than his three-year-old self would be. He acted more like an older boy who was getting ready for school than a child. It must be that he takes caring for his sister so seriously since he was older.

She wondered what he would be like as a young man. No doubt if he kept that expression, he'd be extremely popular with girls. He already has that serious look to him that many girls would find attractive in a boy they like. Maybe he'll be a little heart breaker when he's in high school.

Aqua perked up when he felt like someone was looking at him. He turned his head only to find his mother staring at him. She didn't normally do that, so it was kind of weirding him out. Ai squealed on the inside when he made a confused face that made him look so cute.

"What?" He asked her.

The nerve of this boy, as if a mother needed a reason to stare at her cute little boy. Both of her babies were the cutest things on the planet. Especially when they did cute things like pout or try to fake cry.

"Ah! Ai! Stop!" Aqua yelled.

Ai grabbed him and started kissing his face in a ruthless and devastating attack. She started tickling his neck as she laughed at his misery at being attacked by his mother. Aqua was always so serious, so she needed to tease him to get him to laugh.

"Stop trying to escape Aqua-Can!" She yelled in mock hurt.

"Stop horseplaying back there." Miyako-San said from the front. "You scared me Ai, I could get into an accident."

"Sorry." Ai laughed as she stopped her attack on Aqua.

Miyako-San shook her head at the display. Ai may be a mother, but still being so young meant that she still acted like a child herself sometimes. Seriously, not only does she babysit the kids, but she also has to babysit the full-grown Idol teenager too.

"Thank you, Miyako-San." Aqua said as he tried to fix himself. His hair was a complete mess, and his clothes were ruffled.

"Aqua-Chan, don't sound so grown up." Ai pouted, before she broke her composure and giggled a bit.

"Yes Ai." He said, still using her name.

Although she was used to it, it still hurt when he refused to call her mama or even something formal. He always just called her by name which was odd for a child.

"What were you looking at Aqua-Chan?" She asked, taking her phone back which fell next to them when she attacked him.

"Nothing much." Aqua said.

Ai gasped slightly in shock. She expected something like YouTube or something to do with kids shows. Maybe even just random browsing. Instead, he was looking at the news of events that happened last night in the western regions of Japan.

There was a reported gang war between what was assumed to be opposing Yakuza groups. Multiple Yakuza gang members were lying dead in the street in a rural part of the country, clearly murdered with guns. How they even have guns was always a mystery to Ai since guns were illegal in Japan. The story didn't show any graphic details of the murder, but there were blurred images of the dead men for the public to see.

Now why a three-year-old child has any need or interest to read something like this was beyond her.

"What were you looking at Aqua-Chan?" Ai asked.

"What is it?" Miyako-San asked.

"It was that Yakuza gang war that happened last night." Ai said.

"I read about that." Miyako-San said. "It's disturbing how those kinds of things can happen."

"Mama, what's a Yakuza?" Ruby asked.

Ai noticed that Aqua looked at her like she asked a stupid question. Why is it a stupid question? A child shouldn't know what that is. She decided not to bring it up.

"They're very bad people." Ai stated. "They're people that hurt others and don't care about anyone but themselves."

"I thought they were only in shows." Ruby said.

"Miyako-San." Ai complained. "Why are they watching things about Yakuza?"

She noticed both Ruby and Aqua tense, clearly guilty at watching things they shouldn't be watching.

"What do you mean?" Miyako asked. "I never let them watch anything that isn't cartoons."

Ai noticed Aqua motioning for Ruby to be quiet, only to quickly try and stop before she looked at him. Aqua actually started to seem a bit worried when Ai glared at him.

"Aqua-Chan, are you showing your sister bad shows?" She asked.

"No Ai, we didn't watch anything like that." He said, which Ai didn't realize was not only true, but he also couldn't tell her the real reason they knew about the Yakuza.

It wasn't like he could say he enjoyed crime dramas while he was in university when he didn't have tests coming up. Unfortunately, Ai interpreted everything as him watching things he shouldn't.

"We'll need to ensure we buy a child lock service on our T.V." She said. "You shouldn't be watching things like that at your age. Or surfing the news about bad things like this Aqua-Chan." She said.

"I was just curious Ai." He said. "I wanted to know what's going on."

"Well, you don't need to right now." She said, putting the phone in her purse. "You're much too young to be looking up things about this."

Aqua sighed and decided to drop the topic. She was so worried about their mental upbringing and wanted to ensure that they didn't see anything that could lead them down bad paths. Especially that since as children, they couldn't fully process the harsher realities of the world like grownups like her.

Like her... right. Ai wasn't a grown up. She's a dumb teenage girl that got pregnant at 15 and can barely make a living for herself and her children. After her groceries, she has only 20,000 yen left that has to last till the end of the week before her next concert. Even then, ticket and merchandise sales have been down lately, and the President was assuming that her check would be 150,000 Yen this time. After taxes and bills, she might walk away with less than 80,000 Yen.

As if sensing her sad aura, Ruby decided to hug her mama, instantly making her feel better. She loved how affectionate Ruby was and her heart melted. She didn't care how much she'd mess up. Ai was going to do everything to devote herself to being a good mama.

"Why did they fight mama?" She asked, referring back to the news story.

"Because they're bad Ruby-Chan." Ai said. "Anyone who has guns or do illegal things are bad people. And if you ever meet someone like that, you run away." She lectured.

"Right!" Ruby said in excitement. "And if they try to hurt mama, Aqua and I'll protect you." She smiled.

Ai looked at her son who raised an eyebrow at his sister's antics. He shrugged, as if half agreeing.

"Oh?" Ai asked. "Well, I'm glad I have my darling children to protect me. If anyone tries anything I'll let you guys fight them off." She smiled.

Ai threw small mock punches at Ruby, who imitated a martial art move by blocking and throwing little punches of her own at Ai. She laughed with her daughter, who kept proclaiming how amazing at fighting she was. Ai reached down in the seat and gave Ruby a small kiss at the little display.

Miyako, who was watching the whole display from the rear-view mirror, shook her head at the young woman's antics. She should be a bit more serious as a mother, but there was no doubt that the display warmed her heart.

Night Prior

Sergei had to park the car near the city and get a new one that he staged. With all the bullet holes in this one, it was bound to get attention from the authorities. Especially since there would be police in the area where the shootout happened within minutes.

After doing the switch, Sergei and Eren got to the warehouse where the drop was happening. There were more Chinese agents meeting them, so Sergei got the weapons out of the van and handed them over. After a quick inspection, the man in charge handed Sergei the money and walked off. They put the crates in another car and prepared to drive away from the warehouse.

Eren stayed near the car, keeping his eyes on the entrance in case they were attacked again. He kept Sergei's gun in his belt line in order to have easy access to it.

"Not bad for first mission, yes?" Sergei said, walking up to Eren.

"Could have gone better." Eren said.

"Welcome to arms dealing." Sergei laughed. "When you sell things that kill, sometimes people try to kill you."

"Guess so." Eren shrugged.

"You're too serious." Sergei said. "You need woman in life."

Eren ignored that comment, choosing instead to stare out at the entrance as he watched the Chinese leave the warehouse.

"I need gun back." Sergei said.

Eren reached into his belt line and pulled out the pistol and handed it to Sergei. Sergei put it back into his coat and made sure it was secure.

"I have one more crate I'm delivering." He said, motioning to the one that was still on the floor.

Sergei opened it up and looked at some of the guns. They were all pistols from what Eren could gather. There were so many different types that he couldn't really tell what they were.

"Damn." Sergei said.

"What's wrong?" Eren asked.

"They gave me piece of shit." He said, pulling out what looked like a Marleyan pistol.

It had the same exactly look to it, with the bullets being housed in the front of the gun. It looked pretty from what Eren could tell. It was engraved all over and had a lighter coating of metal than the darker Marleyan pistols. It didn't look like it had a silver coating, just a bit shinier than he expected. The handle was the same shape but looked to be made out of a tan colored material.

"It looks pretty to me." Eren shrugged.

"It's stupid Chinese knock off." He said in annoyance.

"How so?" Eren asked.

"It's supposed to be authentic Mauser C97 from 1940s. But look at it, it doesn't shoot German 7.62 Mauser. It shoots Russian 7.62 Tokarev." He said in annoyance.

"That's a shame." Eren shrugged, not really caring.

"I was going to sell it to collector, instead they decide to shit in my cereal." He looked at it in annoyance.

"It still looks good, it could fetch a decent price." Eren commented.

"Quality is good. Engraving is well done, and handle has ivory. But issue is that it's not collector piece." Sergei complained. "People charge a lot for rare and authentic items. This is just modified Mauser, not original production."

"So you can't sell it?" Eren asked.

"Not if I want to keep reputation." Sergei said. "You take it." He tossed the gun to Eren, who caught it.

"Really?" Eren asked.

"Think of it as bonus on top of Yen." Sergei said. "I got no use for it. Cost me money to get it, but it won't return."

Eren inspected the gun. It looked really nice. The ivory handle was expertly crafted, and the engravings were very detailed. There was an eagle stamped and engraved on both sides of the internal magazine and it had a wing carved into both sides of the ivory handle. It was way too flashy for Eren, but he liked it. It felt familiar in his hands.

"Here." Sergei said, throwing some boxes at Eren. "One hundred Tokarev rounds with five stripper clips. Ask me if you need more ammo later. though next time bullets cost money." He said.

Eren shrugged and put the small boxes into his hoodie pocket while putting the Marleyan pistol in his belt line on his lower back. The gun would stay there and still be concealed by his hoodie.

"So now what?" Eren asked.

"We'll need to get you place to stay." Sergei said. "You did good, but you can't stay in hotel forever. Too expensive."

"Any ideas where I can go?" Eren asked.

Sergei thought for a moment but had a good idea.

"I can let you stay in apartment complex a friend of mine runs." He said.

"Is that right?" Eren asked.

"Da, he'll give discount." Sergei said. "He usually lets people rent who don't show ID or have documents. Many people use it who don't want to be traced."

"That's helpful." Eren said.

"It's not perfect, you need fake ID and passport. It won't help you if scanned or digitally entered, but it can pass eye test." Sergei said.

Eren decided not to ask what he meant by digitally entered. He felt that it would be useless given that the technology here is too advanced. Though since Sergei was going through a lot to help him, Eren knew that this implied he was going to be doing much more work for him.

Sergei took out a black little box, tapped it a few times, and brought it up to his ear and started talking. Eren could tell it was a kind of radio or phone, though since it had no wire, it was obviously much more advanced than his world. even Marley couldn't make something so advanced.

Sergei spoke in Japanese so Eren didn't know what he was saying. He seemed to be haggling over price or the terms of the deal, so Eren just let him talk. After a moment he hung up and put the small phone in his pocket.

"Good news, we got room for you." Sergei said.

"I'm assuming you're dropping me off?" Eren asked.

"Of course." Sergei said. "We'll take you now."

Eren got into the car again and waited as Sergei entered as well. He started up the car and started to drive off.

"It's nice little place. Few people live in it." Sergei said.

"Perfect for me to stay hidden." Eren said.

"Da." Sergei said. "Good news too, there is single mom living next to your apartment. Could be good for some fun." Sergei suggested.

"Not interested in a wife." Eren said dismissively.

"Who said anything about wife." Sergei laughed. "Single moms are perfect. In country like this, they're looked down on and have hard time finding man. Always up for good time." He laughed, patting Eren on the back. "She's young too, you're age. It's perfect."

"I think I'm good." Eren said dismissively.

"You don't have to do much. Just talk to her, take her out for some roses. Maybe get nice meal." Sergei said. "There's always prostitute if you prefer paying."

Eren ignored his rant as he looked out the window. He really didn't care about some random woman living next to him in an apartment. Eren never really focused on any kind of relationship since he was always fighting. He's sure the woman is nice, but he doesn't really care to talk with anyone unless it was related to surviving.

Eren glanced at Sergei, knowing that meant the only person he could talk to is him if that's the case. Eren sighed at the thought and instead wanted to focus on getting some sleep tonight.

Another chapter done. You guys probably see what's happening next time lol. I hope all the characters are staying relatively in character

and doing what you'd expect them to do.

Hope you guys like it. Please review and let me know if it was bad or good.

Awkward Meetings

Chapter 3: Awkward Meetings

Eren woke up in his new apartment room after getting some sleep from last night's job. He noticed that the clock on the wall was roughly around noon time. He couldn't understand the symbols of the numbers, but it was more or less the same as his own languages format. He knew the top number was noon if both hands were near it. However, he couldn't really tell what the numbers were exactly. The symbols seemed to be kind of random in comparison.

Getting out of bed, Eren cracked his back to loosen all the joints from sleeping in the unnaturally soft bed. It had been a while since he slept in a comfortable bed. Probably not since before he left his friends in Marley before he went rogue. Since then, it was either a trench in the Mid East, a rundown hospital bed, or a prison cell back on Paradis.

Eren looked around at the mostly empty house. He really only had the basics in terms of furniture. He had a single couch, a futon bed that he didn't bother to roll up, and a small kitchen table that was so low to the ground you had to sit on the floor. He had some basic kitchen supplies, but he didn't have the food to make use of them.

He went into the washroom in order to take a quick bath. The technology was similar to Marley but significantly more advanced. It also looked more futuristic, with everything being shiny and little to no exposed pipes. Then again, that may be a symptom of being an Eldian in Marley.

The bath was quick. Normally he didn't take many baths since it was a luxury in the walls prior to the retaking of wall Maria, but now he bathes every chance he can get. It was very relaxing that he would sometimes just let his mind wander to better things.

When he was done, he put on his pants and shirt before going to the mirror to look at himself. His stubble was starting to grow back, while his hair was still the same length it was when he fought the Marleyan strike-force in Shiganshina. Taking a razor that was supplies in the room, Eren began to shave the stubble to get his face smooth again. He used the hand soap that was on the sink as a way to make the razor slide along his skin and avoid cutting himself.

Eren stared at himself in the mirror. His hair was still down and damp. He looked normal again, not anything like the madman he was when he needed to push himself to fight. He seemed different though, something was off. He wasn't the rage filled youth he was after his mother died, nor was he the driven man who planned to destroy the world. Now he felt... off.

Eren went over into the main room, which was the only other room minus the small hallway that lead to the front door and looked over his new gear. The new pistol he had was on the kitchen table and completely disassembled. It worked exactly like a Marleyan pistol, complete with all the same screws and grooves along the frame. The only difference was the high quality of the engravings and the ivory handle.

Eren reassembled it and took out the stripper clips he had. Each clip could hold ten of the bullets that Sergei gave him, meaning that he could shoot as many times before reloading. He took the box of ammo and loaded each round into the stripper clips until all five were ready. Once that was completed, he hand loaded the Marleyan pistol so that in total he could carry 60 rounds of ammo on his person.

Eren found a notebook and pencil that was in the apartment. It helped him study some of the number systems that Sergei mentioned. For the moment all it had on the first page was the symbols on the clock and his own languages numerical system. So far, he had what he assumed to be twelve numbers, but the translation wasn't too good.

Apparently, Japan has a lot of things written in English instead of Japanese. In this case, the numbers used English numbers since it matched what was on the Yen. However, unlike his own numbering system that has multiple symbols for numbers like two or three, this one seemed to have one symbol representing the number until it reaches ten. Ten having a unique symbol that's absent from the rest.

He would just have to memorize the symbols if he was ever going to learn how the currency works here.

Eren put the pistol in his beltline on his lower back, put on his hoodie and shoes, and put the five clips in his pocket. He decided to go get some fresh air for the time being. Before leaving, he put his hood over his head and then walked outside into the parking lot, which was mostly devoid of vehicles since most people were at their jobs and away from home. The apartment complex was relatively small and if Sergei was right, consisted of mostly people who didn't want to be traced.

Eren assumed this meant other criminals, but according to the man, they were all people who either ran from personal issues or just wanted to be left alone. In the end Eren didn't care much about it.

Right as he reached the edge of the parking lot to lean against the waist high fence, a vehicle drove into the complex. Eren glanced through the window and noticed two adult women in the car. The woman in the back had a hat and what looked like glasses with an unusually dark Lense. He could barely see two blond heads just poking up and assumed they were children. The woman in the middle seat glanced at him for a moment before turning away. She said something to the woman driving, but Eren paid little attention to them as they drove past him.

Eren heard them exit the car and glanced back for a moment as he watched them enter the room next to his. This must be that single mother Sergei mentioned. Since there were two women, he didn't know which was which. Maybe the purple haired girl since she was

around his age. The other woman looked older. They carried a bunch of bags full of food from the vehicle.

His curiosity ended there. He really had no interest talking to people or getting to know his neighbors. He really had no interest in doing anything right now except rest.

Eren looked up and lamented his position here. He had nothing. No name, no history, no chance at a normal life. How could he, when everything here requires papers that he doesn't have and can't get. If he gets discovered by the authorities, they'll assume he's here illegally. He doesn't know how Japan handles crime. In Paradis before the walls fell, crossing into the interior without permission could be punishable by death. Even crossing the borders in the countries beyond their island carried some prison sentence or capital punishment. He assumed much of the same applied here.

Even then, does his survival matter? After everything he did, does he deserve anything less than this? To continue to struggle in a cruel world. What a fitting fate for the "Devil of Paradis". To live in a world with no friends, no fate, and no life.

Did he think of suicide? Surprisingly no. Eren didn't consider it at all. Because even if the world is cruel, he has a right to live in it. No matter what, Eren would not succumb to despair. He'll keep living, for no other reason than to keep drawing breath. Because he's special for being born.

Eren turned away from the fence and went back towards his apartment. The women and children were by this point in their own room and no longer there.

Right as he was about to open the door, Eren noticed a small object on the ground. It was rectangular in shape, like a playing card. He walked over to it and picked it up.

Normally he'd be surprised by the quality of the picture. A quality far exceeding that of Marley's best cameras. But he already saw the

large moving pictures on the buildings when he arrived, so it was less of an impact.

It was a picture of the purple haired woman, minus the hat and weird glasses. She gave a gentle smile in the picture and faced the camera directly. There were Japanese writings all over it. The only things he recognized were some of the numbers from his studying from the clock. It was odd for a country to use multiple languages on their stuff.

Eren guessed this is what they meant by identification. He wasn't sure if it was a passport, but his best guess was that it was.

The woman must have dropped it when she exited the vehicle. Her door was right there so Eren figured it'd be best to return it. He walked up to the door before giving four loud knocks to get her to answer the door.

Eren was surprised when she gasped after seeing him standing in front of her.

A Few Minutes Prior

"Good to be home after a long day of shopping." Ai said as they were about to pull into the driveway of their apartment.

"Another successful day of hiding." Ruby said happily.

"All thanks to by big girl wearing a mask." Ai praised, hoping that by praising the behavior it might break her aversion to masks.

"It's really not that hard." Aqua grumbled from his spot.

"I think Aqua-Chan is just being grumpy." Ai laughed.

He smiled a bit at the banter but still rolled his eyes at her antics. He sure was going to grow up to be a serious boy.

"Careful when you get out Ai." Miyako said. "There's a weird guy in the parking lot."

Ai glanced over at where Miyako was saying and noticed a weird man leaning against the fence. She couldn't see his face very well, since he had a hood up and hid his face from view. He looked very suspicious just standing there, as if waiting for something.

For a moment, as the car passed them the man glanced at her and made eye contact. Her heart skipped a beat for a moment, worried that he could either be a journalist or worse. Ai did love all her fans, but she knew the dangers of being an idol. Specifically, the stalkers and crazed fans who could get violent if they felt offended. It was the whole reason she led this double life of hiding and sneaking.

"Did he look at you?" Miyako asked.

"Yea, for a moment. My sunglasses and hat are still on, so there's no way he can recognize me." She said.

"When we get there, you go straight inside with the kids. I'll handle most of the groceries." Miyako said as she began to park.

"Come now, that's not right." Ai said. "These are our groceries so we're not going to leave you alone with them."

"But if he notices to then we're screwed." Miyako said.

"Then we'll try hard not to get noticed." Ai said. "No one knows I had kids so with this disguise we'll be fine." She said.

"Not unless that doctor said something." Miyako said.

For a moment, Aqua got visibly upset, like he was offended by something that was said.

"Are you ok Aqua-Chan?" She asked her son.

"Uh, no Ai. Just annoyed at that guy." He said rather quickly.

"Don't be so mean about strangers Aqua-Chan." Ai said before turning to Miyako. "Even if he does recognize me, there's no certainty that he means to hurt us. Besides, we can just go with the same story of them being your kids."

"But if he leaks something?" Miyako asked.

"I'll stay at the company until people realize that you live here, and I just visited. It's not strange to visit the wife of my boss." She reasoned.

"Unlike you, my address is public information." Miyako said. "We had to go through a lot of legal loopholes to ensure your name isn't tied to this address. It won't be long for a dedicated fan to put things together."

"Then we'll move." Ai said. "Everything will be fine, trust me." She said with a smile.

Miyako relented before getting out of the car and went to the trunk to get the bags of food.

"Aqua-Chan, Ruby-Chan, do you want to help mama with the food?" She asked.

"Yes!" Ruby yelled, running over to get a bag that maybe was too heavy for her.

"Sure." Aqua shrugged, being his normal serious self.

Ai went to get the last of the bags while Miyako opened the door. She glanced one more time at the stranger who had his back to her. No way he recognized her. Despite the potential danger, she didn't want to automatically assume every fan was a stalker, so she didn't want to judge him for just being in one spot. The fact that he hid his face was weird, but that's his business.

"Et!" She gasped as she almost lost one of the bags and had her purse fall off her shoulder and get caught by her elbow. She struggled to get to the open door but was able to make it inside.

Miyako was already busy putting away some of the food by the time Ai got the rest over to the kitchen. She placed the bags on the floor before taking her hat and glasses off and rolling up her sleeves to start putting things away.

"Do you mind if I take a bath?" Miyako asked. "I didn't get a chance this morning."

"Of course." Ai said. "I'll have a change of clothes ready for you." She said.

Since Miyako took a lot of the babysitting while Ai was practicing or going to concerts, she kept a few pairs of her own clothes here as a necessity. It made sudden calls easy to manage since she could stay a few days on short notice if absolutely needed.

"My husband will be here soon to go over some of the details of the next concert." She said. "Make sure you answer the door when he gets here."

"No problem." Ai said as she winked and held a thumbs up to the older woman, causing Miyako to sigh slightly.

After she finished, she went over to the main room where Aqua and Ruby were at. Ruby was busy typing on Ai's phone that she fished from her purse, while her son was currently watching T.V. She raised an eyebrow when she saw him click the remote right when she entered. Add to that the fact that he was very close to the T.V. and that the volume was unusually low.

"Aqua-Chan, you're not watching anything you're not allowed to, right?" Ai asked her son.

"No Ai, just switching to kids shows." He said. He sounded very convincing to Ai, but she knew he was lying.

"Well move over, let me watch with you." She smiled as she sat next to him on the floor, very close to the T.V.

One round goes to Ai for forcing him to watch age appropriate T.V. instead of whatever he wanted. Although he was a good liar, the excuse "Switching to kids shows" was a very poor lie.

Suddenly there was a knock at the door.

"Must be the president." Ai said outloud. She got up and started going over to the door. "Oh wait." She said after thinking for a moment.

Ai turned back to Aqua, took the remote away from him, and took it with her. No way he was watching bad shows while she was at the door. She laughed as she heard his defeated sigh.

She placed the remote on the kitchen counter before going to the door. She opened it up expecting to see the president standing there with his usual glasses and bored look.

Instead, she gasped when she saw the man they thought was suspicious standing right at her door. Miyako may have been right.

He was tall, very tall compared to her. She had to arch her neck back just to look at his obscured face. She barely even came up to his shoulders. What was he? A mountain?

"H-hello?" She asked cautiously.

" *Do you speak my language?* " He asked in English.

Ai's English wasn't the best, but she was actually fairly good in it. She learned it at a young age like most children and studied harder than most. After all, there was a chance that idols had to go

international and most of the world either spoke English or were proficient at it.

" *Yes, I do.* " She replied back, though she could tell she had an accent compared to his.

Now that she saw under the hood, especially with her short stature, she could now tell he was a westerner. She saw a few western fans at her concerts occasionally. Some were still as excited as many of the Japanese fans.

" *You dropped this.* " He held out a card.

Dropped... Wait! That was her ID!

Oh no! he knew her now. Not only did he see her name, but he saw her picture as well. He clearly knew who she was now. All because of her clumsy mistake.

She knew though not to react or give him a reason to spread a controversy. So far, he did nothing wrong as was probably just a normal fan. If anything, he went out of his way to return her property. So, she should just treat him how she treats all her fans.

" *Sorry, clumsy me.* " Ai said in a higher pitched voice, bonked her own head, and stuck her tongue out in a cute and childish fashion. Her innocent act was always expected when she met fans, so she needed to be in character.

" *Right...* " He said in an uncomfortable tone.

"Mama, what's taking so..." Ruby said as she came into view.

She froze when she saw the stranger. The stranger in turn, looked directly at her daughter. Ai's heart did stop now. He saw her daughter and heard her call her mama. Regardless of if his Japanese was good or bad, mama was an English word.

" *Well, if that's all you needed.* " The stranger said as he started to turn around.

Ai in a moment of panic tried to stop him.

" *Wait don't go yet.* " She said in a sweet tone. " *I can give you an autograph. How's that sound.* " She said as she adopted a cute pose by tilting her head and putting two fingers over her eyes.

" *I'm really fine.* " The stranger said.

" *I insist.* " Ai said sweetly. " *It's not every day you get to speak to an idol.* " She was hoping to buy his silence with an autograph or maybe even free tickets. She couldn't let him leave knowing not only where she lives, but also that she has a child.

" *A what?* " He asked.

Ai's composure broke for a moment. What does he mean a what? Even if he just arrived in Japan, her face was everywhere. Everyone knows what an Idol is. Especially westerners who come to Japan.

" *An idol... you know.* " Ai tried to explain but was taken by surprise at the conversation.

" *Look, I don't care.* " He said. He didn't seem angry or anything, just tired and wanting to leave. " *I appreciate the offer, but I'm really not interested.* " He walked away.

Ai stood there for a moment in shock, clearly not ready for how that whole interaction played out.

He seemed creeped out by her behavior. Almost like the way she acted was unnatural to him. He didn't seem angry or offended, just creeped out. Much the same way she felt when overzealous fans acted weird or did weird things.

Ai went back inside and closed the door behind her. This never happened before. Everyone she met when not in disguise would

always recognize her. Even westerners. He had her ID which has her name clearly printed. Even if he couldn't read Japanese, her face was right there. He should know who she is.

"Did he just insult you mama?!" Ruby shouted, marching cutely over to the door. "Mama is the best!" She said, intent on opening the door.

"Ruby, no." Ai said, grabbing the almost four-year-old and taking her back into the living room.

"But he insulted you mama." Ruby tried to defend.

"No, he didn't." Ai said. "If anything, I think I was the one who creeped him out."

"But you looked like he said something bad to you." Ruby said.

Oh right, she can't understand English. Not surprising given her age and the fact that she hasn't taught her children English yet. To her, it looked like he said something that offended her.

"No, he was very nice." Ai said. "He just didn't care I was an idol."

"Didn't care!?" She yelled again. Maybe that wasn't the best way to phrase that. "He should care because you're the best!" She defended.

"Yup, mama is the best." She smiled as her daughter defended her. "But it's not right to be mean to fans. No matter what they say or do. You always have to be nice to them."

"What's wrong?" Miyako said as she left the washroom. She was dressed in simple pajamas and her hair was wrapped up in a towel.

"That stranger knocked on the door." Ai said.

"What!?" Miyako screamed. "Did he see you?" She asked in a panic.

"Yes, Ruby too." Ai confirmed.

"Oh no... it's over..." Miyako looked down casted.

"He didn't know who I was." Ai said.

"That's impossible." Miyako said. "Everyone knows who you are."

"True, but he's a westerner. He doesn't know." She said.

"Then why'd he knock on the door?" Miyako asked.

"I dropped my ID outside and he got it back for me." She said.

"So, he's seen your face and name." She sighed.

"I don't know, he didn't seem to know Japanese." Ai stated.

"Did he seem overly excited?" Miyako asked.

"Actually, he seemed creeped out." Ai said.

"Creeped out?" Miyako asked. "How so?"

"Well, I figured I could offer him an autograph of concert tickets. So, I got into my idol character." She said. "I thought I could maybe buy his silence, but he just looked uncomfortable. Honestly, it felt like I was outside looking in." Ai laughed.

"There's no way we lucked out." Miyako said. "He has to be lying. He probably got mad at seeing Ruby and wants revenge so he's going to expose everything."

"He acted like that before he saw Ruby." Ai countered back. "Like my whole persona was just creepy to him."

"Well, odds are we'll never see him again." Miyako hoped. "But we can't have that again. I'll talk to my husband. You're banned from ever opening the door again."

"And what if I'm alone and need to answer it?" Ai asked.

"If it's not myself or my husband, you'll stay away from the door and pretend like you're not home." She ordered.

"Yes ma'am." Ai said with a salute, mocking Miyako's rules.

"Be more serious Ai. We don't know what would happen if you were stalked home. We can't risk your address getting out." She said.

"Aw, but Ruby said she'd protect me." Ai pouted as she kneeled down next to her daughter.

"Yea, I can protect mama." Ruby said proudly.

Miyako sighed and put her head in her hand. This girl was just a nightmare to deal with sometimes.

"Fine, I promise. No more opening the doors." She laughed. "I'll make sure to include shackles in my living room too." She joked.

"Laugh all you want; it could one day save your reputation." Miyako said.

Ai walked over to Aqua who was listening to the exchange very intently. She decided to just sit down with him and watch a kid show together. She had most of the opening songs memorized by now since she listens to them non-stop. Even Aqua would sing along, though he sounded bored if nothing else.

"How about we watch an animal documentary." Ai smiled at her children.

"Yea, that sounds fun." Ruby said.

"That's great and everything Ai, but you took the remote." Aqua said.

"Oh right." She laughed, remembering it was on the kitchen counter. "I'll go get it."

Eren sat down on his bed as he thought about the weird woman. When she opened the door she seemed scared at first. That didn't bother Eren so much since he was much taller than her and probably looked suspicious. What was weird though was the way she acted. She started to act childish and in a weird manner as well as offering him something he didn't understand.

Not only that, she said she was an idol. Like a religious thing? Was she worshipped or something. He had no idea.

She also got really scared and panicked slightly when the little girl showed up. He caught the word mama, so he could tell it was her daughter. Again, her nervousness was normal. It was her strange behavior that kind of annoyed him and even creeped him out. It felt so completely fake and unnatural for her to act that way.

Then again, he never met a Japanese woman before aside from the manager of that store, so maybe it was normal.

Eren could admit that she was cute though. She almost reminded him of Historia when she still went by the name Krista. The innocent act was more forced, but it felt roughly the same. Plus, they both had a very small and thin frame.

Then again, she wanted to be here to remain anonymous since most people came here for that reason. Eren knew that he would easily be able to do that since he had no intention of interacting with her. He really was in no mood to speak to anyone or try to form new friendships after what happened.

Suddenly, Eren heard a ringing of a phone. He stood up and walked over to the house phone that was connected to a wire. He picked it up and held it to his ear.

"Kid, that you?" Sergei said over the line.

"That's correct." Eren said.

"Good, like new room?" He asked.

"It's ok." Eren said.

"Did you meet single mother?" He asked.

"Yes, I did. Not interested." Eren said in annoyance.

"Ah, darn. You could use womans touch." Sergei said.

"I don't need a criminal giving me life lessons." Eren countered back.

"Fair." Sergei said. "I called because I have new job tonight. Good money."

"Sure, another gun run?" Eren asked.

"No, different. You good with gun, but are you good with fists?" Sergei asked.

"I know how to fight." Eren confirmed.

"Good, there is underground betting match tonight." Sergei said, peaking Eren's interest. "Criminals bet on fights, fighters fight, and money is lost or made. We're going to make money." Sergei explained.

"You don't even know how good I am." Eren said.

"Don't need you to be athlete, just good." Sergei said. "Fights are fixed, so you need only follow script." He explained.

"So, you want me to play along and lose a few matches on purpose." Eren deduced.

"Da, illiterate but getting a bit smarter." Eren got annoyed again.

"Don't tell me you have dumb morals." He said.

Not really. Eren had no issues throwing a few fights in a betting match. It's not exactly like he was above a little manipulation. After all, he posed as a wounded Soldier for weeks after the battle of Fort Slava. Throwing a few fights wouldn't make him any less bad than he already was.

"I can throw a few fights." Eren said.

"Good, pick you up tonight." Sergei said, hanging up.

Eren didn't even get to ask when he'd arrive.

"So, he didn't seem like he would talk about Ai's location?" Aqua asked his sister after Ai went to bed. Miyako and her husband left shortly after their meeting, so they had time to speak.

"I don't think so." Ruby said.

"Do you know what he said?" Aqua asked.

"I don't know English, so no. I don't know what mama and the stranger were saying." Ruby said.

"Damn." Aqua said.

"That's a bad word." Ruby said.

"I know, it's fine." He said, not interested in being lectured by a baby.

Aqua didn't know how old Ruby was before she died and was reborn, but he assumed she was probably young since she easily adapted to being a toddler and didn't seem very well educated.

"I wish I was there, I could have heard the exchange better." Aqua said.

"You speak English?" Ruby asked.

"Yes, why?" He asked.

"How come you never told us when mama was doing her English lessons?" She asked.

"We're already pushing it with how well we speak Japanese. Could you imagine if Ai suddenly realized her son can speak English despite never being taught?" Aqua asked.

"Oh, good point." She said. "When'd you learn?" She asked.

"Unlike most kids, I kept studying. Most kids don't do more than mandatory lessons and lose their knowledge." He explained.

"Do you think we need to do the whole Kami thing again?" Ruby asked.

"That won't work." Aqua shook his head. "we're not infants anymore so everyone would think we're pretending. That or assume we're mentally retarded." He explained.

"Well, mama said he doesn't know who she is. So, if that's the case, we should be fine." Ruby hoped.

"Even if he doesn't, he could find out." Aqua explained. "Her face is everywhere. All it would take is him telling a friend he knows her address and it spreads from there."

"So we do nothing?" Ruby asked.

"It's not like we know where he lives." Aqua said. "Unfortunately, there's nothing we can do." He shrugged.

"So we just hope everything works out fine." Ruby said in a worried tone.

"All we can do, unless some higher power helps us out. Then again, it's probably the same one that put me back in diapers." Aqua said in an annoyed tone.

"I understand." Ruby said.

"Anyway, let's get back to Ai before she wakes up and realizes we snuck off." He said.

"Sure." Ruby said. "But I get to sleep cuddled with her. It's weird if an Otaku decides to cuddle in her chest."

Aqua shook his head at Ruby. Not that he would. Even he felt that would be weird. Especially since he was literally twice his mother's age.

That's a sentence he'd never thought he'd say outside of a joke. It was one of the reasons he refused to be breast fed. Sure, she was technically his mother, but she was also a 16-year-old girl at the time. Even now that she's almost 20 it's still weird.

Fact is, she wasn't his mother. He never really had a mother. As far as Goro was concerned, he had no mother. Hoshino Aqua may have a mother, but he's burdened by memories of almost 30 years of life.

He wasn't worried about the stranger though. Even though some westerners were fans of Ai, most weren't. So, he did believe that this stranger was simply just a guy doing a decent thing by returning the ID.

Besides, it would only be weird if they ran into him again. It was likely he didn't even live here so odds are they'd never see him again.

And there's the next chapter lol.

It's actually funny, originally, I was going to have Eren act weird but my buddy recommended I make it so Eren was the one creeped out by Ai's behavior. Seems pretty fitting in my opinion lol.

Anyway, please let me know what you guys think. Criticisms and sustains are welcome.

Fight Night

Quick Note: So, I messed up a bit. Thought the kids were supposed to be three when Ai dies, turns out they're four lol. So, making a slight change to the ages. It'll change nothing in the story lol. Don't worry though, things will play out differently lol.

Chapter 4: Fight Night

Eren never had any experience dealing with criminals or underground networks. Not unless you count his own little rebellion when he overthrew the Military. He didn't think he could really count them considering they were a bunch of dumb kids who followed him for a brighter future.

His own group, which was named the Yeagerists, was nothing more than a means to an end since Eren didn't really consider the idea that he'd live after he enacted the Rumbling. So, in terms of his experience in the criminal elements of society, it was very much lacking. If Captain Levi was here, he'd have a much better understanding than him.

Eren got out of the car with Sergei at the unassuming building that was supposed to hold the underground ring. It was old and secluded away in the industrial part of Tokyo.

"This is where fight will be, far from police and prying eyes." He said.

"So, what's the point of this?" Eren asked.

"Money, as with everything in crime." Sergei said. "Yakuza have old sense of Japanese honor and want to prove themselves in fight. Higher ups bet and make money. So I have client who wants money."

"You're not just an arms trafficker then." Eren assumed.

"I have side business, but main income from weapons." Sergei corrected. "Besides, it lets me judge you."

"How well I can fight?" Eren clarified.

"I know you can fight; I see it in how you beat Yakuza." Sergei said.

"I know my way around a gun." Eren said.

"No, the skill required to move and shoot the way you did takes more than good aim." Sergei said. "You have skill, in fists too. I have no doubt."

Eren shrugged, not caring too much in this little "Evaluation" that Sergei had planned. He only wanted money until he found himself in more legitimate work. Until then, he would work with the old, Russian? Yea, Russian. That's what Sergei said he was.

As they passed a guard at the door and entered the warehouse, the smell of smoke and alcohol assaulted Eren's senses. It was relatively calm from what he could see. There were women dancing and serving drinks in revealing outfits while gang members sat and talked in booths all around a ring. The lights were dimmed, giving a dark overall look to everything. Eren knew he was in a dangerous place.

Sergei led Eren to a locker room for him to get changed. There wasn't much for him to change, only into a pair of thigh length shorts and taking off his shirt. Sergei took his pistol and ammo for safe keeping.

"Wow, you have muscles." Sergei commented when Eren removed his shirt.

"So how will this go?" Eren asked, ignoring the comment.

"In total, you need to fight five times. It's like tournament. Fifth fight is the end. Get good name and do well so people will bet on you. In last fight, lose but make it convincing." Sergei explained.

"That's what your client wants?" Eren asked.

"Da." Sergei confirmed. "Client is big Yakuza boss. While everyone bets on you, he bets against you. So, all money goes to him. Then we get cut."

"That seems easy enough." Eren commented. "Win four fights and throw the last one."

"Make it convincing." Sergei said. "If you intentionally lose, people will get pissed and might start fight. Avoid that."

"Easy enough I guess." Eren said.

"First fight will be soon, get head in space." He said, patting Eren on the back.

Eren shrugged as he sat down to collect himself. He may not have his Titan abilities, but he was a master at hand-to-hand combat. After the Military overthrew the King of the walls, Eren and the Scouts developed specialized hand-to-hand combat moves that were used for Titan combat. It was amazing how well it translated to regular hand-to-hand combat in his human form.

He remembered something Captain Levi said to him after the attack in Liberio. How Eren had the same eyes as the broken men in the underground. How he never imagined it would be on him. Since he kissed Historia's hand that day, Eren don't think he had a single moment of true happiness.

He stood up and walked over to the mirror and took a look at his eyes. He honestly didn't know what those eyes that Captain Levi saw looked like. Eren knew he was broken. He knew he was a husk

of his former self. His rage and anger replaced with the sole desire to just keep trudging on.

How appropriate that Eren was now a member of the underground filth of society.

"Let's go. It is time." Sergei said, interrupting his thoughts.

Eren walked away from the mirror and over towards the simple ring. It was just a different colored concrete pad in the middle of the audience, who was still rather quiet. They chatted among themselves, but Eren couldn't understand a word they were saying due to the language barrier.

As Eren stepped into the ring, a muscular Japanese man in the same kind of outfit as him walked in. He was covered head to toe in what looked like body paint. The body paint looked like a combination of mythical beasts and fish. There were so many that he had trouble distinguishing them.

"Make fight good, you need to be popular to get people to bet on you." Sergei said from behind him. With a light push, Eren was put in the center of the ring.

Eren looked at his opponent again. Short, buzzed hair and a lean body. He wasn't nearly as defined as Eren, but he knew that was no indication of strength. The man looked like he was ready and excited. Less of a fun excited and more of a wolf waiting to pursue a deer.

Eren heard the announcer talk before the fight began.

He assumed the announcer said go but Eren was able to react quickly. The man rushed at him with a wild punch, preferring to use his strength to deliver a punishing first strike. It ended up being a fatal mistake as Eren moved slightly to the side and deflected the punch with his right arm. Using his left arm, he delivered a cross directly to the man's chin.

The fight was over after that. The man fell down like a doll with its strings cut. He slid for a moment, his momentum halting behind Eren as if he suddenly lost all motor function.

The room was quiet after that devastating hit. There were a few murmurs, but Eren assumed that would be good enough to start getting some kind of rapport.

Without waiting for the announcer, Eren walked over to Sergei who was speechless at what happened. Eren assumed he proved well enough that he could fight. Sergei however, got upset when he was in earshot.

"What is wrong with you?" He asked in an angry tone.

"You said be popular." Eren repeated his orders.

"Yes, but don't win so easily." Sergei said.

"It worked, didn't it?" Eren said, looking around at the hopeful betters.

"Yes, they will bet on you next." Sergei said. "But that's not issue."

"Then what is?" Eren asked.

Sergei face palmed at that question, as if the answer was obvious.

"This is what I mean when I say you're good fighter but stupid." He said. "You have skill, but you're not criminal. You never worked with criminals. Probably only Soldiers."

"I did what you asked." Eren said.

"No, you proved you might be best in fight. Meaning when you throw fight in final round no one will think it's legitimate." He said. "Being criminal is like being actor. You play by script and manipulate to get result. Instead, you fight like Soldier. Kill enemy quickly and efficiently. Good for battlefield, not for fight."

That made sense in a way. Guess Eren really didn't know much about being an actual criminal, outside of maybe a revolutionary.

"So be an actor in a play and make it look convincing." Eren said.

"Da, pretend to struggle. Last two minutes, not a few seconds." Sergei looked down for a moment when he said that. "Feel like hypocrite saying that." He said to himself. "Just struggle next round."

"Sure." Eren said.

The next few fights went by relatively quickly. Most of the combatants bled from the continued attack and some were badly injured. Either their head fell on the concrete, or they broke a bone in an arm bar or in a kick. The men fighting were decent, but clearly, they never fought like that in real combat.

Eren not only fought hand-to-hand as a Titan, but on two occasions had to storm a Mid East Army trench when he posed as an Eldian in the Marleyan Army. He had his fair share of experience fighting other people.

After about an hour all the fights in round one concluded and he was up to fight again.

"Remember, struggle this time. Make it seem like last fight was fluke." Sergei said.

Eren nodded and walked back into the arena. This man was a bit different and had long hair that was tied in the back in a ponytail. Still the same large amount of body paint all over him.

The man taunted Eren, or at least tried to. It was hard to feel fired up or insulted when you can't understand a word they're saying. Eren just stood still with his arms crossed until the moron decided to shut up and fight.

The moment the announcer sounded off, the man attacked. Eren decided to let him get a few blows in. The man landed a hard right round house punch to Eren's left cheek, dazing him for a moment but doing little to actually hurt him. Eren let himself get hit in the gut a few times before deciding to start blocking.

Eren let the man wear himself down with each punch. Creating distance while either blocking or deflecting the man's punches. He had to step back in a circle so as not to run out of room in the arena.

Once he felt like he was satisfied, Eren gave a hard low roundhouse kick to the man's shin, easily snapping the bone and cause the man to fall. There was a moment when he tried to get back up, but the pain soon kicked in and he began screaming in agony as his shin bone was shattered.

Eren felt a bruise developing on his left cheek bone, along with a headache forming from the hit. He almost forgot how annoying it is without his healing abilities. Sure, he still felt pain, but when fully rested, the pain faded away as his body healed the injury. Now he had to deal with it.

Hopefully that was a decent enough fight for Sergei.

Unfortunately, it was not. Sergei looked disappointed and annoyed again.

"That was even worse." Sergei said.

"I let him get a few hits in." Eren said.

"Do I need to video your face?" Sergei asked. "You looked bored, like nothing phased you. You played with him, not fought him. Everyone Know's you let him think he had chance. Only to take it away."

"Guess I'd make a bad stage performer." Eren said in annoyance.

"You are horrible actor." Sergei clarified. "A child could act better."

"A child would die in there." Eren said.

"Stop being prick." Sergei said. "New plan, in final fight, head butt opponent and fall unconscious. No way we can save face now and make it look legitimate."

"Sure Sergei." Eren shrugged. "I'll do my best."

Sergei shook his head and went back to the fights.

Next Morning

Ai yawned as she started to wake up. Her babies were still next to her in the Futon, sound asleep. Ruby was sleeping soundly in her arms, still in the same position she was in when she fell asleep. Aqua was in a different spot so he probably woke up last night or shifted around in the Futon. She smiled as her cute little babies slept soundly. It was hard to imagine they'll be four-years-old soon.

Ai gently placed a kiss on Ruby's forehead before carefully getting up. As quietly as possible, she crawled over to Aqua before doing the same. He shifted a bit when she kissed him, maybe about to wake up, but went limp again as he went back into a deep sleep. She smiled as he did, glad he can sleep a bit longer.

Ai got out of the Futon and went to her small kitchen table, which had a laptop plugged in. The sun still wasn't up yet so it gave her time to do her normal morning routine.

She got on her knees and opened the computer up, making sure that her screen brightness was all the way down so as to not wake up her children. First thing was to check her social media to see what happened last night. As always, her posts from yesterday exploded with random comments. She looked over her Twitter account which had a post of a cute cat that Miyako took while out.

Sometimes Miyako or the President will take random pictures and she's upload them to continue the Hoshino Ai Idol act. To be fair though, the cat was kind of cute.

Ai is stupid and only famous for her looks. She has no real talent.

One post read, suddenly making her sad. There were a few of these posts. Things where people would say hurtful things over stupid reasons. She always worked so hard and dedicated herself every day for her fans. She did everything she could to try and improve and be an idol they deserve, but for some it wasn't enough.

Ai checked her email to see if anyone said anything important. There was a quick message from the President about the upcoming timeline for the concert. Mainly where her and the others would need to meet up, what specific things to pack, and an hour-by-hour plan of everything they'll do that night. Three hours will be dedicated to makeup and hair styling in her dressing room.

Once the actual work portion was done, Ai went to her online English book to work on her English lessons. She studied hard every day to make sure she had a good grasp on the language. It was important for anyone in Japan to learn English since it opened so many doors and opportunities. She really never intended to do anything overseas, but it was important to leave the option available.

She took out a notebook that had a cute little cat picture on the cover. It was so adorable and cute. She loved it and used it to write down notes for her studies.

Her thoughts drifted to the mysterious man from yesterday. She never got his name, but it was still odd for him to not know what an idol was. He was tall and very handsome, even if he wore a hood and had long hair blocking most of his face.

She could tell he was a westerner from his face alone. There was an almost exotic look to him. She wondered if he was European or

American, since his English was so good. Ai wasn't the best judge of accents, but it sounded more American if she had to guess.

She was worried that he might talk about her to someone when he would learn who she is. Even if he didn't know, she'd be found out soon. Her face was literally everywhere. Even if he didn't intend to reveal her address, he might still bring it up in a casual conversation.

She also felt embarrassed at the interaction. He looked completely annoyed and uncomfortable from her. It was so weird to be on the receiving end of that. Idols were always supposed to be sweet innocent girls who were pure and kind. One of the main reasons she had to keep her children a secret. But he seemed like it was bothering him.

Regardless she had to keep the act up, so she couldn't do anything other than that. Not that she wanted to lie to him, but her reputation and even her safety was on the line. She couldn't afford to slip up.

Despite not being able to be herself, she absolutely loved being an idol. After all, lying was something she excelled at. She was told years ago that if she lied about loving someone enough, eventually it may become true. That's one reason she always said she loved her fans. She truly wanted to feel loved and love others. To really feel what it was like.

"Mama..." She heard behind her as Ruby was waking up.

Ai's heart melted at how adorable she looked. She was standing on the futon while still clutching the blanket. Her pajamas were a bit big since she was still growing into them, so they looked baggy on her little body. Lastly, she was wiping the sleep from her eyes as she struggled to wake up.

"I'm here Ruby-Chan." Ai said, getting her daughters attention.

Ruby walked over to her and hugged her, almost falling in the process from still being tired.

"Easy there." She said. "Are you hungry?" She asked.

"Yea." Ruby said in a tired but cute voice.

"Ok, you wait here. Let me make something to eat." She said.

"Can we have salted salmon?" Ruby asked.

"Of course, no go ahead and play on the computer while I'm making it." She said.

Ai went over to the kitchen and put on an apron. She made sure it was tied around the waste and covered her pajamas so as not to get food on them. Then she went to work preparing breakfast.

White rice, salted salmon, and miso soup was a staple Japanese breakfast that was nutritious and delicious. The salmon was also easy to chew for three-year-olds, so it was a perfect meal for them.

After getting the ingredients ready she started up the burner and oiled the pan.

After maybe thirty or forty minutes, Ai took the plates and bowls and moved them over to the table. Ruby was watching some YouTube video before she closed the laptop and scooted over to her spot.

Aqua was still asleep, not at all bothered by the sounds of moving dishes or the smell of salmon and miso. It's amazing how much he can sleep when there are noises around him. It was like he was on a long and extended vacation.

Ai got on her knees and moved over to the bed. She gave him a small kiss on the cheek.

"Wake up Aqua-Chan." She whispered gently, hoping to wake him up as gently as possible.

Aqua reached out and put his hand on her face, as if she was an alarm he was trying to silence. She giggled at the display, which then

caused him to open his eyes and look at her.

"Good morning, Ai." He said in a tired voice before getting up. He sniffed the air for a moment in such a cute way she wished she had a camera. "Is that salted salmon?" He asked.

"Of course." She said. "And if you don't hurry and eat, it'll get cold."

I got it." He said.

Where was the cute little greeting. He sounds so much like an adult sometimes. Ruby was so cute when she got up and immediately went to hug her. Aqua on the other hand just wakes up and goes right for the food. No love for his dear mother.

It breaks her heart to see him act so grown up but also makes her happy. She's glad he tries to act older because it shows that he will be a good and mature boy when he gets older. But is a little bit of affection too much to ask for?

"Come here." Ai said, scooping Aqua up in a hug from behind.

"Ai! Stop!" He tried to escape.

"No affection for mama?" She asked in a mockingly hurt tone. "My baby thinks he's all grown up."

He is a grown up damnit. He went to medical school. He treated her when she was pregnant with him. He's even had sex before. But instead, he has to be reduced to a child and roughed up by a girl half his age. He loved getting close to his favorite idol, but it was sometimes so hard to just act like a regular child.

"Not till I get a hug back." She said, refusing to let go.

"The food is getting cold." He tried to reason.

"No bargaining." Ai said. "Either hug or cold food." She said.

She refused to let go until get got what she wanted. With a cute little grumble, Aqua turned a bit to give his mother a hug. The annoyed expression and reluctance just made it all the cuter. Being a sweet and innocent idol may be mostly an act, but it felt so natural when she played with her children.

"Can I eat now?" He asked.

"Sure." Ai said, giving him a peck on the cheek. He sighed in annoyance and went over to his plate.

Ai didn't feel bad. That's what he gets for trying to be a man at only two.

Before she went to eat, she needed to check the mail really quick. Their mailbox was right outside the door, so this early in the morning would be easy enough to get it. She put on some slippers by the door and opened it to quickly go outside.

She looked around to make sure there were no other people around before reaching into the mailbox to get the mail.

Ai jumped slightly when she heard someone walk behind her. At first, she thought she was found out, but when she looked around, she saw that westerner walking towards her. No, not towards her, towards the door directly to the left of her door.

He glanced at her for a moment, then walked into the door next to hers. In the brief moment their eyes met, she noticed that under his hoodie was a bruise on his cheek. He walked without swinging his left arm and kept the arm close to his body, as if he got hurt in the left side of his chest. She wondered if something happened to him or hurt him.

Before he went into the apartment, he gave her a weird look again.

Crap, she was staring at him. Why is it that every time she interacts with this guy, she ends up making him uncomfortable and making a

fool of herself?

Also, he lives next to her... Damn. He knows her identity, that she has children, and now is again creeped out by her.

Ai blushes as she goes back inside her own home, face flush from embarrassing herself again. What is with her?

Also, once she got over that, why was he hurt? Did something happen to him? He looked like he got badly hurt or maybe attacked. She wondered if she should go check on him, but she knew Miyako would get very upset.

Instead, Ai went back into her home with the mail.

Night Prior

Eren walked back to Sergei after his fourth fight. Eren was holding his left side after one of the fighters gave a bad blow to his ribs. Eren hated not having his healing abilities, it made the pain last. Add to that his headache was in full swing.

"There' acting is a bit better." Sergei said, noticing him holding his side.

"That last punch was real." Eren said. "My side is actually hurting."

"Well, maybe last fight will be convincing." Sergei said. "Since you're tired and hurt it might be more believable for you to lose. Luckily, everyone is placing bets on you to win. Client will bet you to lose, then all money will go to him."

"Should be easy then." Eren said.

"Let him hit you in ribs, really sell it."

"Yea, then this cracked rib can become a full blow broken one." Eren said.

"You'll be fine." Sergei waved off. "You're young, young people heal quick."

"Right." Eren said, not at all agreeing. Even if it does heal quick, it's nowhere near what his abilities were.

Eren did wish he still had his powers, for no other reason than to deal with the pain much faster. Oh well, perhaps it works out since Eren should be able to live longer than four more years.

"Get ready, opponent is ready." Sergei said. "Remember, make convincing." He said.

Eren nodded and walked into the ring, still holding his side. He really didn't want to get hit in the rib again but knew he had to. He decided to act a little dramatic and limp more than he intended just to sell it a bit better.

Eren endured more pain than most people can imagine. He repeatedly had his limbs ripped or bitten off, beaten bloody, and broken in ways that were fatal to most. Even in his Titan form he still felt the full force of the pain. He remembered the dull ache of Annie punching his jaw off, the pain only dulled by his rage.

His opponent was a simple Yakuza man. Basically, he looked the same as every other fighter. The announcer was saying something in Japanese and really hyping up the match. For all Eren knew he was throwing insults, but the language barrier made it impossible to know.

The announcer gave the ok to start. Eren decided to play at being hurt and exhausted, so he let the fighter throw the first punch.

Eren's senses dulled the moment his head came in contact with his opponent's head. On reaction he tucked his chin so that the headbutt hit his forehead instead of his very fragile nose and jaw. Unfortunately, the hit was too much.

The idiot fell down from the hit, clearly not expecting Eren to absorb the hit as well as he did. The Yakuza fighter was rolling on the ground, holding his head in pain as he struggled to get up.

The announcer called it, knockout.

"Damn it." Eren said in annoyance.

Eren shrugged and walked back to Sergei, who had an annoyed look again.

"You were supposed to lose." Sergei said.

"Tell him that." Eren said. "Not my fault he decided to be stupid."

"You don't get it." Sergei said. "We just cost Yakuza boss big money. Big Yakuza boss. He won't be happy." Sergei said, though not too worried.

"Never thought you'd be scared." Eren said.

"Do I look scared?" Sergei said. "Just get changed, we'll deal with issue." Sergei said.

Eren shrugged and went back to the locker room. He dared anyone to try something to him. Either Eren will win or lose. If he wins, he lives. If he loses, he'll die. Eren faced death many times and this was no exception.

When Eren got in the locker room he held his head in his hands. The headache got worse after that last headbutt. He forgot how annoying lingering pain was. At least he didn't get hit in the rib. He wasn't sure if it was bruised or cracked, but it wasn't broken. He has full experience of broken ribs to know it's not nearly painful enough, even in the dullness of a post-fight rest.

After getting his clothes on, Eren walked outside the locker room. A few people came up to him and patted his shoulder, causing Eren to

get defensive and wince when one touched his rib. They seemed to be congratulating him on a fight well done.

"This way." Sergei said, handing Eren his pistol and ammo back.

"Where to?" Eren asked.

"We meet with Yakuza boss and explain issue. Be quiet and let me talk." Sergei said.

Eren shrugged and followed him. He led Eren to a private room that was surrounded by guards. He looked through the doorway and noticed it was brighter than out in the main warehouse. A guard said something and motioned for Sergei to hand something over. Sergei took out both of his pistols and handed it to the guard.

Eren was next so the guard did the same motion and said the same thing in Japanese.

Eren took out his engraved pistol fast and pointed it under the guard's chin. Everyone froze and for a moment the guards were going to reach for their own guns. Eren wasn't going to be left defenseless surrounded by guards.

Suddenly they stopped when he heard a voice from inside. Eren again didn't understand but the guards relaxed and let them through. Eren decided to re-holster his pistol and ignored Sergei's annoyed look.

When Eren entered he saw this Yakuza boss Sergei was talking about. He was a slightly over-weight man in an expensive suit and big round dark glasses on. His grey hair was slicked back, and he wore a simple chain around his neck and what looked like a golden watch on his wrists. He was smoking one of those Marleyan white sticks, cigarettes, while he had two beautiful women on each side next to him. Both women were dressed in tight revealing dresses.

Sergei spoke first but was cut off.

"Now, Sergei." The boss said in English. "Let's switch to English so the kid can understand."

"I understand." Sergei said.

Sergei didn't come off as scared. Not even nervous. He seemed fully in control of the situation, same as the Yakuza boss.

"The kid is stupid." Sergei said, insulting Eren again. "He was probably Soldier. Good at shooting and fighting but nothing else. He's young too."

"I can see." The Yakuza boss said. "He is clearly skilled. He's probably the best fighter we've seen. But you're right, he is stupid."

Eren ignored the words, choosing not to say anything or express any displeasure.

"I'll pay amount lost." Sergei said. "Tell me money you were supposed to win, and I'll pay it. Should be easy."

Eren raised an eyebrow at Sergei. He was willing to pay for Eren's mistake? Was this some kind of way to trap Eren into a debt to him in order to ensure he is forced to work for Sergei indefinitely?

"Actually, last fighter threw fight on my orders." The Yakuza boss said.

"Really?" Sergei said.

"I changed my mind and betted on the kid. I didn't trust him to lose convincingly." He said. "I still made money, though not as much as I wanted to."

"Then what is it you want exactly?" Sergei asked.

"The kid is good. Hope you don't mind me borrowing him a few times." The Yakuza boss said.

"That's no issues." Sergei said.

"My life is my own." Eren said, getting annoyed at the conversation. "If you intend to force me into a debt to you, I promise you'll regret it."

The Yakuza boss stood up, pushing the two women aside gently so he had room to stand. He walked over to Eren and stared him right in the eyes. Eren stared back, ready and willing to kill the man if he needed to.

The Yakuza boss inhaled a puff from his cigarette and blew it in Eren's face, causing him to cough violently. The coughing aggravated his ribs, but he endured it and stared right back.

Suddenly, the boss started laughing.

"This kid is interesting." The boss said. "That look in his eyes Sergei. There's a spark there, but a dark one. It's so interesting to see. Clearly, he's a Soldier. But as innocent in the criminal world as a fresh new baby."

"He's still young." Sergei said.

"And I have no doubt that if I push, most of my guards will be dead tonight." The Yakuza boss said. "You're free to go." The boss said.

"Understood." Sergei said.

"I'll be looking for him to do some jobs. At his permission of course." He laughed, as if that was a joke to him. "You have a promising future kid, don't die." The Yakuza boss said as Eren and Sergei left.

When they got back in the car, Sergei pulled out his own stick and lit it before driving away from the warehouse.

"You are stupid kid." He said, as if he was dissatisfied.

"Didn't I pass your little test?" Eren asked. "You want to know how I fight."

"I saw fight during gun run, I knew that already." He said. "I wanted to see how you take to criminal life. If you can play game and keep head down. If Yakuza boss didn't find you interesting, he would have chopped you to pieces slowly before you die."

"He can try." Eren said.

Sergei stepped on the breaks, causing Eren to go forward into his seatbelt and aggravating his ribs.

"Damn it Sergei!" Eren yelled, holding his rib.

"You think you're big shot?" Sergei asked. "Think you can take on world and not face consequences? Think that you can fight Yakuza by yourself?"

"If I win, I live." Eren repeated on habit.

Sergei smacked Eren in the head, causing the headache to get worse. Eren almost retaliated but didn't.

"You think life is as easy as winning or losing?" Sergei said. "You think being reckless will get you what you want? What is point of living if you do nothing but pick dumb fights?"

"I won't be in a debt to someone else and a slave to them." Eren said.

"You're rash. Like Soldier charging hill." Sergei noted. "Life is easy when you're in war. Enemies in front and allies behind. You either take hill, or you die. It's easiest thing in world."

"I'm aware." Eren said.

Sergei didn't know Eren's past. He didn't know the "Hills" he charged. Eren fought hard everyday of his life. From bullies to entire nations. He knew better than anyone how the world worked and would be damned if some old man was going to lecture him.

"Are you?" Sergei asked. "You see kid, I lost lots of friends because when they got home, they didn't stop charging the hill."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Eren asked.

"The battle is done kid." Sergei said. "Whatever war you were in is done. You're in new country and new place."

Eren stayed quiet at that. He didn't have the energy to get into a philosophical debate with a damn criminal. He heard Sergei sigh as he pulled up to the apartment complex Eren lived at.

Sergei stopped on the side of the street right before entering the parking lot and let Eren get out. As he was, Sergei said one more thing.

"There's that single mother." Sergei said. "Maybe woman can help you-" Eren cut him off by shutting the door.

Eren noticed Sergei chuckle a bit in the car, annoying him again. The window rolled down so Sergei could say one more thing.

"If you keep in this mindset, you'll die young kid. Find person to temper that mind of yours." He said before driving away.

Eren didn't care about him and just continued towards his apartment. His head was in pain and his ribs were hurting more now that the fight was long over.

He passed by that weird woman from yesterday, who was currently starring at him not. Eren raised his eyebrow as she did so, causing her to look away and blush. Eren had no interest in anyone right now. He just wanted to be left alone.

After getting inside he took off his weapon, hoodie, and boots before falling onto the couch in order to sleep.

Finished another chapter. Like I said, I'll be changing the timeline a bit because I was a bit confused lol. Nothing will change at all.

Please review. It honestly is great to hear what I can sustain in my skills and where I can improve on. Thanks.

Happy Birthday!

Chapter 5: Happy Birthday!

This is a feeling Eren hasn't had in a long time. He slept through most of the morning and was in a lot of pain from the fights last night. If he was just able to fight normally, no one would have been able to touch him. However, because of Sergei's instructions, he had to take a few hits in order to make his loss convincing. Not that he ended up losing anyway, making this current pain pointless.

Eren rolled out of bed and walked over to his wash area. He looked in the mirror again to take a look at his injuries.

His left cheek was a bit swollen and had a purple bruise from the first hit. The skin itself was in no pain but he still had a headache from the hit. He lifted his shirt to expose his ribs and saw a bit of minor bruising. It hurt slightly to breath, but Eren felt ok overall. It probably wasn't even cracked and would probably last a week or two. It was nothing he couldn't handle.

Eren decided to remove his shirt entirely and start doing some basic exercises. He needed to stay in shape if he was going to be staying here long term. Without constant ODM practice, he was worried he would begin losing strength.

Eren stepped outside. The sun was directly overhead, and the clock confirmed that it was about noon time again. He decided it would be ok to workout outside without hiding his face since he really didn't need to worry about anyone recognizing him. After all, he didn't exist here.

There was what looked like an outdoor workout area right near the apartment. It as a few basic poles that were good for simple calisthenic workouts. It would serve his purpose well since all he did

in the Cadet Corp and the Survey Corp was bodyweight exercises and running.

He vaguely noticed the car that dropped off the purple haired girl was in the driveway, meaning that that other woman was likely visiting.

The ability to use ODM gear was as much about physical strength as it was about coordination. The blades may be designed to break when making contact with Titan flesh, but it still required a lot of arm strength to drive it through. Additionally, since older ODM models were designed with the anker and thrust on the hip, it meant that you needed a strong core in order to prevent folding backwards and injuring your back.

Above all else, the most important aspects of strength to be an Eldian Soldier was arm strength and core strength.

Eren started some basic warmups. Push-ups, sit ups, and air squats to get his blood flowing and loosen his muscles. He then started doing basic cardio, like burpees and hops to get his explosive energy up.

Once he was done, he started the actual part of the workout. Eren got on a horizontal bar and started doing pull ups. He kept his arms slightly greater than shoulder width apart, arched his back so his chest was slightly facing up, then began to do the repetitions.

Eren lost count after about ten reps and kept going. The thing that dominated his mind was that purple haired woman that kept acting weird around him. Sergei kept suggesting that he try and date her or just have fun with her. To be honest, Eren wasn't all that interested. He had a woman he loved and cared for, and that was Mikasa. Despite looking like a Hizuru woman, that girl looked nothing like Mikasa. Mikasa still had some Eldian features since she was only half Hizuru, but this woman looked fully like a Hizuru woman.

She also acted really weird. Almost like a child in a way. It almost reminded him of Historia when she still went by Krista, but even Historia acted her age. He guessed the woman was about his age, meaning she should be more mature. Especially if she has children. It just doesn't seem right for a full-grown woman with kids to act like that.

It also reminded him a bit of Annie. While having personalities that were polar opposite, Annie always had this feeling about her that there was something she knew that you didn't. As if she was hiding something and the persona she makes is just a front that hid something below the surface. That ended up being true when they learned she was an undercover agent for Marley.

While the mask was different, Eren could tell there was something not genuine about the way the girl acts.

It's not to say she's a bad person or that Eren dislikes her. From what he's seen she seems nice enough. He didn't know what an autograph was, but she still offered something to him anyway. Even if she did panic a little. Though to be fair, Eren realized he did look scary and suspicious to the small girl that barely stands at shoulder height to him.

Eren dropped from the bar after feeling tired. He felt like he was being watched and turned around to see the door to the girl's residence slightly open. Were they watching him now? He was starting to feel like he was being stalked by the purple haired girl. He doubted she suspected anything about him, but she just acted so weird that he couldn't get her off his mind. She was a mystery to him and it both annoyed and bothered him.

Eren ignored the thoughts. If they wanted to watch they could. He didn't care and he was more concerned about staying in shape than dealing with a purple haired stalker.

An Hour Prior

"You're joking... right?" Saitou Ichigo stated plainly as he sat on Ai's sofa.

"Nope." Ai smiled, already fully aware how he was going to react. She was sitting comfortably on her dinner table while doing some last-minute things with her social media.

"I told you this place wasn't the best." Miyako said to her husband. She was standing right next to him with her arms crossed.

"Great, so now we have who knows next door and he's familiar that you're Ai and have kids." He put his face in his hands. "On top of it, he's probably a weird stalker."

"Don't be mean." Ai pouted. "We don't even know who he is. So, we can't just judge him."

"Yea, but he covers his face. That's suspicious." Ichigo stated.

Ai grabbed her sunglasses and baseball hat before putting it on and giving a winning smile to her boss. Her point was made.

"Don't give me that Ai. You're protecting your identity for your career and your safety." He said.

"True, but so could he. Who Know's, maybe he's a western actor." She countered, removing the disguise and placing them back on the table.

"If he was, you'd think he knows you." Ichigo fired back.

"Maybe he did. He just said he didn't care." Ai said. "After all, western actors have a lot more popularity internationally and actually make good money. So maybe he meant he doesn't care who I am because he's better than me." She guessed.

"That's an assumption Ai." Ichigo said.

"So is assuming he's going to do something." Ai fired back. "Both scenarios are just as likely. Besides, we picked an apartment that is legally dubious at best to protect my identity. Not everyone here wants to be traced."

"Which could mean he's a criminal." He said.

"Or maybe he's hiding from a vengeful ex-wife." Ai countered again. "We don't know his reasons and to be honest, I've been the one freaking him out."

"How is that?" Miyako asked.

"He just seems different." Ai said. "My cute idol act really bothers him." For emphasis, Ai flashed them a cute smile with double peace signs over her eyes, making both husband and wife almost swoon at how cute she is. "But he doesn't like it at all." Her normal demeanor came back, though now she sounded disappointed.

"She keeps claiming he doesn't know who she is." Miyako said to her husband.

"It could also be a trick." Ichigo offered.

"Well, how about we invite him to a concert?" Ai suggested.

"Are you crazy?" Ichigo asked.

"Why not?" She said. "If he doesn't know about me, he'll learn soon enough. Won't it be better if he learns with us so we can explain our situation?"

"Or what if he uses that knowledge against us? What if he tries to sell that information for clout or money." He said.

Unknown to both of them, Miyako looked down in shame when they said that. Knowing that if even the closest person to Ai could be capable of betraying her, then this random stranger could as well.

"I have to agree with my husband Ai." Miyako said. "We can't let him near you. It's too risky for you and your kids." She said.

"Yea, I guess you're right." Ai looked down in disappointment.

Wait... disappointment?!

Why is she disappointed? Does she want this guy to come to a concert? Does she want him to know all her dark little secrets?

"What's with the face?" Ichigo asked.

"What face?" Ai asked.

"Are you sad about not meeting him?" He asked, causing Ai to blush.

Oh no.

"No, of course not." Ai denied. "It's just that he said he doesn't know what an idol is so I thought if we could take him to a concert, he might change his mind. Who knows, he can be another fan." She smiled, flashing another peace sign.

"No! We are not wasting a backstage ticket on some western idiot that doesn't know what an idol is!" Ichigo said. "We don't know who he is or what he wants."

"Maybe he just wants to be treated fairly and not be labeled as something he's not." Ai said in an annoyed tone. The words she spoke really hit home to her as well.

"Ai, we're ready." Aqua said as he walked into the main room. He was dressed up in smile clothes that matched his personality very well. With simple slacks and a white T-shirt and dark colored hoodie. Like most of his clothes, they were a size too big. He looked adorable in it.

"Yup mama!" Ruby ran into the room as well, dressed in a cute little flowery dress with a sweatshirt on.

"Ok kids, we're ready to go out." She said, donning her disguise along with her own sweater. Her les had skinny jeans which let her appear more casual so she wouldn't be recognized.

"Shouldn't you wear a mask?" Ichigo asked.

"Not a good idea." Ai said. "The air quality is fine today so it would look weird if we did."

"Then what about you at least?" He asked.

"Nope." Ai stuck out her tongue and held up a peace sign again. "Still suspicious. Wouldn't want anyone to think I'm a criminal or stalker for hiding my face."

That little brat. If he didn't teach her how to pull off that innocent act, he never would have realized the way she threw his own logic back at him.

Ai ran over to the door before helping the four-year-olds... crap... they're four. Her babies today are turning four. Why are they growing up so fast? She feels like crying at the thought.

"Let mama help you Aqua." She said.

"I got it." He said, putting on his own sneakers.

The big boy act again? Why is he getting so old? Soon he won't have any need for her!

"Mama, I can't do it!" Ruby cried as she struggled to lace her shoes.

"Ok!" She smiled, glad one of her kids still needed her. Though it was weird that Ruby can't tie her own shoes.

If she was paying attention, she'd see the smug look she shot over at her biological brother.

' *Brat.* ' Aqua thought to himself.

After leaving, the President and his wife were alone now.

"Is she developing a crush?" Miyako asked.

"No, no, no." He denied, more to himself. "It's not like they actually talked. There's nothing to worry about." He said.

"So, we're going to get everything ready now?" Miyako asked her husband.

"Yup, let's do this." He said, moving some boxes out of the closet.

Inside were decorations for the twins fourth birthday party. Ai wanted to do something special, so she took them out while they set up the little party. Since Ichigo ended up being a kind of grandfather of the group, with Miyako being a second mother, they were always present during parties. Though this one Ai was pretending to forget about the birthday this year to the twins so that she could surprise them. Much to Ruby's annoyance.

They spent nearly 45 minutes filling balloons, getting the cake out of the fridge, putting candles in, and putting the presents nearby.

As she was setting things up, Miyako looked out the door to see if Ai was back yet. She didn't see Ai, but she saw something she wasn't expecting.

"Oh my..." She said.

"What?" Ichigo asked.

"It's that guy who lives next to us." She said, closing the door but leaving it cracked enough to see him.

"What's he doing?" Ichigo asked. "Is he spying on the apartment?"

"He's working out." Miyako said. "And he's shirtless."

"Ok..." Ichigo said.

"He's hot." Miyako said.

"What!?" Ichigo said in shock and surprise.

"Would you just look!" She said in anger.

Ichigo ran to the door and watched the man workout. Yup, there plain as day. He's doing pullups and showing off that impressive physique while sweating from the exertion.

"Oh god, he is hot." Ichigo said in fear.

"If Ai sees... that!" She pointed at the door. "We're screwed. She's going to get another set of twins and our problems will get worse."

"She's not into him." Ichigo said.

"Do you know nothing of women!?" Miyako screamed. "Did you see how she talked about him and defended him? She has a crush. We can't let them meet, ever!" He said.

"Ok." He said, still watching.

"We need to make sure Ai is monitored. I'll stay here extra hours out of the week so I can make sure they don't meet." Miyako said, pacing back and forth. "We'll install CCTV cameras all over the apartment in order to see if anyone comes near the apartment or enters." She stopped. "What do you think?" She asked.

"35, 36, 37, 38, wow, he's still going." Ichigo said in amazement.

"Are you listening-38?" She cut herself off. "He did 38 pullups?" She asked.

"Since I started counting, and still going." Ichigo said.

"We're doomed." She said. "She is going to go after him the moment she sees that, and we're doomed."

"Oh wait, he saw me." He said, closing the door fully. "That's embarrassing." He laughed.

"Can you focus!?" She yelled. "Shouldn't I be the one ogling him?" She asked.

"Huh?" He asked, confused.

"I mean- never mind." She deflected. "We need to focus on how to prevent Ai and him from meeting."

Ai wasn't focusing on her walk with the kids very much. All she could think about is the strange man who lives next door and seemed hurt this morning. She didn't tell the President that detail because she was worried how he would react.

Wait, why was she worried? It's not like anything bad would happen. Who knows why he got hurt. He could just as easily fell down the stairs as anything else.

Ai understood better than most that the identity people see in public isn't always the identity that is really there. It's just as fair for him to assume that she's completely innocent and pure because that's the lie she created. It wasn't fair to judge him on something when she knows nothing about him.

After all, if she just assumes everyone is a criminal or a stalker, she can never truly meet anyone else.

BONK!

"Itai!" Ai screamed as she walked headfirst into a pole.

"Mama!" Ruby shouted.

"I'm ok darling." Ai said. "That hurt." She said.

"Are you ok Ai?" Aqua asked.

"It's just a bonk." She said sheepishly.

"No, I mean are you ok, as in you seem distracted." Aqua clarified.

It was scary how smart he was sometimes.

"Oh, just thinking about nothing in particular." She said.

"Is it about that guy?" Aqua asked.

"W-what? No, o-of course not." She lied poorly.

Why did it feel like her own son was interrogating her like a father would his daughter for thinking about a boy. He's her son darn it!

"You know, there's nothing wrong with just talking to the guy." Aqua said.

"That's not it Aqua-Chan."

"Is it because of what the President said?" He asked.

"No, it's just grownup stuff." Ai deflected.

"Maybe you should try to talk with him. At least come to an understanding." Aqua said. "I think you'll feel better if you just talk."

When did her baby boy get so mature? Is it normal for kids to be so mature after only four years being alive? The sad thing is, he's right. All these thoughts and concerns can just be laid to rest with a simple conversation.

"Maybe he'll be our papa!" Ruby said, completely jumping the conversation.

"W-what!?" Ai asked loudly.

"Ok, maybe that's too far." Aqua tried to say.

"Yea, since we don't have one, he could be one." She suggested.

Suddenly, Ai got very sad. In all the years they've been together, have they ever wanted a father in their life? Miyako was almost like a second mother, and the President took care of them occasionally, but they knew he wasn't their real father.

Did they yearn to meet him? To have a father in their lives and have that strong parental figure to guide them. Her ex may not have been the best of men, but is it right to not give her children an opportunity to know the truth?

They agreed never to talk, but what if he had desires to meet them? Maybe not take care of them, but maybe he would like to at least see them on occasion. Ai didn't think it was right to deny either her ex or her children the opportunity to meet.

"We don't need a Father Ruby." Ai said in annoyance.

Doesn't need? He said they don't need one?

Ai never had a father in her life, and her own mother was abusive to her. President and Miyako did end up being a kind of parental figure in her life, but maybe they would like to have their real father in their life.

Maybe if she called him and let him know her thoughts, her ex would want to. If not, then they go on living like a normal family. No issues there.

"I think you should meet him mama!" Ruby said in excitement.

Oh yea, they were talking about the weird guy.

"Ok, I'll try to meet him." She smiled. "But only to clear the air. No papa's for you yet." She smiled at her daughter.

"I know, I don't care. You're the best mama!" She smiled, and Ai's heart broke a bit more. Maybe they do need a father in their lives.

Ai decided on an impulse that she was going to try and contact him before the party. She didn't want to tell them anything incase he decided he didn't want to see them. Truthfully, she didn't mind if he showed up or not. It wasn't going to change a thing in their family.

"I'll talk to him tomorrow. Who knows, we might get another fan." She smiled.

"Yea, you can show him how awesome idols are." Ruby said in excitement.

"Again, we should just talk to him first." Aqua said, though he was now being ignored by the two girls.

With that goal in mind, Ai walked back to the house with her children.

Ai was so excited. She really hoped Miyako had her phone ready to record. Her babies were going to be so surprised with the effort they put into this.

After their walk, Ai quickly went to a pay phone to try and contact her ex. She managed to reach him and he agreed that he was going to come over soon once he gets time. She wasn't really thrilled to see him, but it would be good for her children to meet their father.

Walking into the driveway, she slowly went over to the door, trying hard not to get excited so her kids won't notice anything unusual.

She opened the door, which was still a bit dark since she messaged President Saitou that she was almost there. She took off her disguise and shoes, and helped her children take them off as well.

"It's kind of dark." Aqua said.

"Yea it is." Ai said, her voice wavering from the excitement.

"I thought Miyako-San and Ichigo-San were here." Aqua said.

Come on, just get into the main room and stop questioning things! Why does he have to be so observant all the time!?

"Let's go into the living room." Ai said, pushing her children along so she can hurry it up.

"Why, is there a surprise party?" Aqua asked.

"Surprise!" Miyako and Ichigo screamed, turning the lights on and using little birthday poppers. "Happy Birthday kids- Ai? What's wrong?" Ichigo said walking up to his most successful idol.

Ai was on all fours with her head down and her bangs obscuring her face. She looked like she got punched in the gut with how destroyed she appeared.

"I failed." She said. "He's too smart, he figured it out."

Ruby went up to her mother and patted her on the shoulder to hopefully console her.

"I was surprised mama." Ruby said, glaring at Aqua.

"What? It's our birthday and she was acting odd." He shrugged. "It's not that hard to piece together." He deduced.

"I'm a failure of a mother." Ai said, still not moving from her defeated pose.

Aqua sighed and walked over to his defeated mother. He felt bad and in hindsight thought he should have just pretended to not notice and be surprised. So he did the best way he could think to cheer her up.

"Sorry Ai." He said, putting a hand on top of her head and hoping to make her feel better.

Suddenly, Ai got up and scooped him into her arms, eliciting a yelp from the boy.

"Oh, my smart little man." Ai said, her mood instantly turning a 180. "I am so proud of you for finding out. You're so smart."

"Please put me down." He said while being crushed by her hug. His face was being pressed into her breasts and he felt very uncomfortable at the contact. Especially since he still had a hard time seeing Ai as his mother instead of just a girl half his age.

"Mama, what about me!" Ruby said angrily, jealous at the attention her brother was getting.

"Of course!" Ai said, scooping her up as well, though she couldn't get up from her kneeling position. "Oh wow, I can't carry you both anymore." She said. "When did you both get so big."

She missed being able to carry both children with ease and holding them both. Now she had to divide up her time between them both and it almost broke her heart. She wanted to always hold them both. Soon they'll be too big to even pick up. Especially Aqua who might grow to be much taller than her.

"Can we open the presents?" Ruby said excitedly.

"Not yet, we need to eat the cake first." Ai said as she wanted to sing Happy Birthday to them.

The night went on very easily for the mother and her family. The kids got excited when they got to open their presents and looked so happy. Well, Ruby looked happy. Ai always just accepted the gifts, but it was hard to find out what he really liked. She got him a lot of manga and classical books that he seemed to enjoy. He always picked older teenage and adult oriented books.

By adult oriented, she means more mature stories and even a few medical papers. Not etchi books of course, but she was terrified of the day when he becomes a teenager and starts getting into that.

Ruby was always vocal about her wants. She got a few dresses that were a few sizes too big for her, so they'll last the next year or two. Along with cute socks and accessories.

The adults started passing around beer, but Ai told them not to drink too much since the kids were here. Especially since her boss and his wife needed to drive back home afterwards.

She only got beer for these occasions and refused to keep beer anywhere in the house since her son tried to take one. She didn't know if he was being rebellious or just curious, but she found him trying to take a beer from the fridge. A three-year-old! It was lucky that he wasn't strong enough to open the can or he may have gotten a sip.

despite that, Ai liked this family she had. It wasn't by any stretch a normal family, but she liked it regardless. The President was an old man at heart, but he always showed a softer side to her. If she did have a father, she could imagine he would have been like him.

Miyako always complained at first about taking care of the kids, but she ended up treating Ai like a little sister or even a daughter.

After the party, the children started to fall asleep from overeating the cake and all the excitement. Ai went over to where she kept her Futon rolled up, picked it up, and unrolled it on the floor.

"Come on Aqua." She said as she let him walk his way to the Futon. He looked tired but he didn't complain about it.

"Sure Ai." He said as he rubbed his eyes.

"Make sure you get good sleep today. Tomorrow, Miyako-San says she'll take you to the park to burn off the calories from the cake." She smiled.

"Ok." He said, quickly passing out.

Ai walked over to Ruby, who was struggling to stay on her knees at the table from being so tired. Ruby was always so affectionate so Ai picked her up, struggling slightly to do so. She lifted her daughter up, who was already asleep by the time her head hit Ai's shoulder.

Ai laid her down on the Futon right next to where she slept. Ruby always wanted to be cuddled so Ai was more than happy to oblige her daughter. Aqua on the other hand always preferred his space. The first couple of times Ai held him to her chest, she woke up with him on the other side of the Futon. Almost as if he tried to get away from her.

Ai had no issues with that since she read that it was normal for the eldest child to try and establish some form of independence from the mother. Especially a boy. It also said that boys who do not have father figures tend to try to be more independent. This was likely because they begin seeing themselves as protectors of the family. It was a cute thought, though she'd never let that role fall to him. Her job as their mother is to defend them and nurture them.

But maybe it would be good for him to meet his father.

Ai smiled at her children as they slept peacefully in the Futon. They were so adorable like that. It's one of the few times she sees Aqua as innocent and not constantly acting like a grownup.

"We're getting ready to leave Ai." President Saitou said.

"I'll walk you guys out." She said.

"It's ok." Miyako said.

"Don't worry, it's dark out." Ai said. "No one will see me."

President Saitou stumbled a bit, despite Ai saying not to drink too much. But luckily his wife didn't drink anymore than one beer so she would be ok to drive home.

They opened the door and she walked outside with them. It was chilly in the cool night, but she was feeling fine despite that. President Saitou stumbled but he was walking to the car regardless.

"Listen Ai." He said.

"What?" She asked, tilting her head slightly.

"I don't want you opening the door for anyone but us, understand?" He said. "I know you say you'll be ok, but I can't imagine the thought of something happening to you."

"I'll be fine." Ai said with a smile.

"Listen, just humor me?" He said.

"Is this about him again?" She asked, pointing to the door next to her own.

"Yes." Saitou said. "I know it's wrong of me to assume that someone means to do you harm without first getting to know them, but I just can't help it."

"I'll be ok." Ai tried to say, though she waivered a bit.

"Please, just do it for me." Saitou begged. "Just so I can sleep better at night if nothing else."

Ai looked down when he said that. After all these years, he did truly show that he cared for her. It made sense after all, she was his best performer and one of the main reasons B-Komachi was as big as it was.

"Ok." Ai said. "I'll do it for that reason alone." She gave in.

"Thank you, Ai." He said.

"Now you need to get some rest too. I don't want to have to drag you into my Futon." She laughed.

"Funny kid." He said, stumbling to the car where his wife was waiting.

After they drove off, Ai stayed for a moment longer to watch them go. She felt that she would be fine, but he seemed really sincere about his thoughts on the stranger.

" *You were pretty loud tonight.* " Ai screamed as an English voice said behind her. " *What's wrong?* " The voice asked.

Ai turned around to see the stranger dressed in a simple short sleeve shirt, jeans, and boots. He took her by surprise but was standing next to his open door.

" *You scared me.* " She said.

" *Sorry.* " He apologized.

If she really wanted to follow the spirit of the President's worries, she should just go inside and not talk to him. But he only said not to answer the door.

" *No problem.* " She replied. " *Oh, sorry for being noisy.* " Ai said, remembering his comment.

" *Don't worry about it. I can't sleep right now anyway.* " He said.

Ai noticed that the bruise on his cheek looked about the same as this morning, but it didn't look too bad overall. He was still careful with his left side so she assumed he hurt himself.

" *What about you, are you ok?* " She asked, pointing at his face and side.

" *Yea, I just got attacked last night on the street.* " He said.

" *Oh no!* " Ai said. " *Are you ok? What happened?* "

" *Just some idiot.* " The stranger shrugged.

" *Do you need help?* " She asked.

" *No, I'll live.* " He said back.

There was an awkward silence that followed, though he didn't particularly seem bothered by it.

" *What's your name?* " She asked.

" *Why do you want to know?* " He retorted.

" *Because you live next to me.* " She replied. Isn't that normal to ask a neighbor? Especially since they live right next to each other.

" *It's Eren Yeager.* " He said.

" *Eren Yeager.* " Ai tried it out. " *I'm assuming Yeager is your family name, right?* " Ai questioned.

" *Yea.* " Eren said. " *It's not the same here?* "

" *For Japan, it's family name first.* " Ai said.

" *Then what's your name?* " He asked.

He doesn't know? How doesn't he know? Even if he's been here a few days, he should have seen her pictures and on T.V. by now.

" *Hoshino Ai, Ai being my given name.* " She said. " *Didn't you see from my ID?* " She questioned.

" *I can't read Japanese.* " Eren said honestly.

He can't read Japanese? What is he doing living here if he doesn't know?

" *This whole time, I thought you knew who I was.* " Ai laughed, mostly to herself.

" *You keep saying that.* " He said. " *Should I know who you are?* "

" *Maybe.* " She said.

Ai spread her feet slightly and put her hands just over her eyes, winking at Eren and sticking her tongue out in one of her classic poses.

" *Hoshino Ai, one of the most popular idols in Japan.* " She said proudly.

Only to be met with complete silence. She held the pose, but slowly it was starting to break from just the sheer awkwardness of the situation.

" *What is an idol?* " He asked again.

" *Do you really not know?* " She asked.

" *I'm not from here. I don't know.* " He said.

" *Well, an idol is someone who performs. Like dancing, music videos, acting, and anything to do with entertainment.* " Ai explained, which was weird because she didn't think she ever actually had to explain her job.

" *Like a circus performer?* " Eren asked.

Ai busted out laughing from what he said. Circus performer? Did this guy come from the 1800s?

" *No, not that.* " She said, holding her stomach. " *I sing to make people happy.* "

" *I think I understand.* " Eren said.

" *Did you ever go to a concert?* " Ai asked.

" *No, I never have.* " Eren replied.

" Well, how about you come to my next concert. I can get you backstage tickets. " She said.

" What is a concert? " Eren asked.

How does he not know what that is?

" I'm sorry if this sounds rude, but how don't you know? " She asked.

" Aren't you from American or something? " She realized she may have said something rude because he got quiet for a moment.

" Where I grew up was kind of isolated. " Eren said after a moment of thinking. *" I really never saw much of the world. "*

So, he's from a small rural town perhaps. That explains a lot. rural areas typically don't have the same access to entertainment as people who live in cities.

" Well, how about I show you your first concert. " Ai said in her idol voice, posing with two fingers.

" Can you please stop doing that. " Eren said.

" Doing what? " Ai asked.

" You keep acting like a different person when you do that. " He explained. *" Can you just act like yourself; you are much easier to talk to. "*

Ai blushed when he said that. No one ever said her idol act was bad or even uncomfortable. Everyone she meets loves the persona she portrays.

" Ok, I won't then. " She said.

" Thanks. " He said, again making her blush. Did she really creep him out that much?

" So, do you want to come to the concert? " She asked.

" *Not really.* " Eren said, turning her down.

" *Oh.* " Ai said sadly.

Ai never imagined she'd get rejected before. She knew that if she wanted to, she could ask anyone out on a date and they'd say yes in a heartbeat. But she never imagined she'd get rejected so casually. It kind of made her sad.

Not that she wanted to go on a date with him. She just wanted to show him what a concert was like.

" *Well, goodnight.* " She said sadly before walking towards her door.

Eren didn't look at her. He seemed like he was contemplating something, but instead decided to go back into his own room.

Ai sighed sadly as he went in. He seemed like a really interesting person, but she couldn't force someone to do something they didn't want to. Right?

With determination, Ai walked over to his door instead and knocked on it, causing Eren to open the door and look down at her. She forgot how tall he was.

" *What's wrong?* " Eren asked.

Ai reached into her pocket and took out a ticket that she had from earlier. It was a backstage pass for VIPs and she wasn't giving Eren a choice.

" *No one should go through life without seeing a concert. So, you're going to come whether you like it or not.* " She smiled.

Eren raised his eyebrow at her. He seemed slightly annoyed and maybe considered slamming the door in her face, but he didn't.

" *You're going to make me?* " He asked in a serious tone.

" Yup, even if I have to drag you to the stage myself. I'm stronger than I look. " Ai said proudly.

Eren looked away again, but instead of rejecting her again, he only sighed and nodded his head.

" You win, I'll come by to see what it's like. " He said.

" Good. Make sure to dress nice. It'll be a fun event. Trust me. " She smiled and gave him her idol pose.

" I though you said you won't do that. " He said.

" If you're going to an idols performance you need to see it in its entirety. " She said. *" So, you'll have to deal with it. "*

If she paid attention, she would have seen just the slightest twitch of a smile on his face before it vanished.

" Do what you want. " He said, closing the door.

Ai quickly went back into her own apartment and shut the door. She was breathing heavy a bit and her heart was racing. She didn't know what came over here, but the thought of him rejecting her proposal was unacceptable to her. He needed to see a concert at least once in his life.

She was determined to make him a fan of Japanese music and get him on the Hoshino Ai fan wagon. No matter what.

Thanks for reading. Hope you guys enjoyed the sweet moments in this one.

One thing I like in crossover stories, is how events in the story change as a result of the new characters. As you guys can see, Eren's appearance caused the conversation with Aqua and Ruby's father to happen much sooner, which will have consequences. As

well as Ai's promise not to open the door. Doesn't mean she's safe, just that things will play out differently.

However, I don't think it's a spoiler to say that an AixEren story probably won't go the route of the show lol.

Going to the Concert

Chapter 6: Going to the Concert

"Ruby. Pssst. Wake up." Ruby heard her biological brother call her quietly.

Ruby was nice and warm in her mother's arms and really didn't want to get up. That stupid otaku brother of hers was trying to wake her up without waking up their mother. Ruby was getting slightly annoyed at it, but she compelled herself to get up.

"Ok, be quiet." She whispered back.

They agreed yesterday to talk at night when no one was around so that they could go over a thought Aqua had. She didn't know why this had to happen tonight since she was still tired from the excitement from yesterday.

Ruby started to carefully move her mother's arms so that she could get out of her grasp. She did so as carefully as possible so as not to wake her up. She managed to get one arm free and started to sit up.

Only for Ai to groan for a moment before wrapping her arms around Ruby again, this time fully pinning her to her mother's chest.

"Help!" She almost yelled but kept her voice down.

Aqua gently crawled over to give her a hand moving Ai's arms off of his sister. In his previous life, Aqua did actually workout and keep his body healthy. Nothing hard or anything to actually make him strong, but he did occasionally jog and do basic body weight exercises. After all, exercise was good for the body.

Aqua had no doubt that in his previous life he'd easily be able to overpower the young woman. But as it stands at being a newly aged up four-year-old, Aqua might as well be fighting a professional Mixed Martial Arts fighter in terms of strength.

After finally getting one arm free, he motioned for Ruby to pry. Ruby managed to get the last arm trapping her free, before Aqua slid one of the pillows in Ai's arms. In her dreams, she must have thought it was Ruby because she instantly squeezed the pillow as if it was her own child.

Both kids were out of breath from the exchange. It was a good thing his mother was such a heavy sleeper, otherwise that would have gone poorly.

"Ok, come on." Aqua said as they moved away from their mother and into the main hallway.

"What's this about?" Ruby asked.

"Something was different about Ai yesterday." He said.

"Yea, she wanted to talk to that one guy." Ruby said.

"No, I mean, when you mentioned a father." Aqua said.

"So?" Ruby asked, causing Aqua to smack his own face.

"I think Ai contacted our father." He guessed.

"Do you think so?" Ruby asked.

"Yea, remember when she went to the pay phone?" He said.

"Yea, but she said she was calling Miyako." Ruby said.

"You believed that?" Aqua asked in astonishment. "If she wanted to contact Miyako, she would have used her cell phone."

"Maybe it was dead?" She countered.

"You played with it after she left the pay phone." He countered back.

"So, what's this about?" Ruby asked seriously.

"Doesn't it strike you as odd that in the past four years, we haven't once met the man who impregnated Ai?" Aqua said, refusing to call him his father after abandoning his family.

"Not really." Ruby said innocently.

"Never once did you think about it?" He asked.

"I mean, it was weird. But why should we care?" Ruby said. "All we need is mama."

"But maybe Ai thinks we're curious about our supposed father and want to have some kind of father in our lives." He said. "She looked sad when you brought it up."

"I see your point." She said. "But if that's the case, then what's the big deal? We meet our father and maybe get another family member."

"Because in four years we've never seen him." Aqua pointed out. "It's odd. Normally the father is in the picture in some way. Either through visitation rights or even child support."

"Ok?" Ruby said, unsure of the conversation.

How young was she to not know any other this?

"So, either he completely abandoned us and waived his rights as a parent, or Ai wanted nothing to do with him." He explained.

"Why wouldn't he want to be with Ai?" Ruby asked.

"Real life isn't all fun and games Ruby." Aqua said. "We don't know what kind of relationship they had. All we know is that they're distant enough to where she only felt comfortable calling him on a pay phone instead of her cell phone."

"Meaning...?" Ruby asked again.

"Meaning I don't think Ai fully trusted him with our information." He said.

"Then why contact him now?" She asked.

"I don't know." Aqua said honestly. "Maybe there was a spark there between them, or maybe she is willing to trust him now when she didn't before. There can be a million reasons."

"Have you dealt with this before?" Ah, his sister can be observant at times.

"Unfortunately, yes." Aqua said. "I've had to help people on occasion deal with these kinds of situations. So, this who situation with Ai strikes me as weird."

"Maybe he's not too bad." Ruby said. "Plus, mama probably got rid of all her old contacts when she had us. He also probably changed a lot of his contacts too because maybe he was also an actor or something."

Aqua actually was surprised she thought of that. Now that she said that, it was a good point. Even if he was a normal guy, he could be attacked for being the guy to "Ruin the innocent Hoshino Ai". Plus, normally in entertainment, actors and singers typically associated with and dated other actors and singers. Meaning that there's a chance Ai's ex was an idol similar to her.

Or maybe he was an older man who was her director or producer that took advantage of a 15-year-old girl. That's a horrifying thought as well as would explain why they cut off from each other so much.

Sadly, it's not all that uncommon for higher management to take advantage of the idols they employ.

"Man, who knew being an idol had so much drama." Ruby said innocently.

That's one way to put it. It's unfortunate that young idols like Ai end up either getting abused or attacked by not only fans, but production members as well. It's not a stretch to say that there could potentially be people in higher management or even basic laboring that can also be obsessed fans as well. It was always dangerous for Ai to work with anyone, which is why President Saitou often did all the negotiating and planning for her.

While it was good for her, it was also risky for many idols since these presidents could also abuse them since they're in such an authoritative position above them. Thankfully, President Saitou never showed anything like that. The only issue was his wife's gold digging, but that hasn't been a problem since they pretended to be Kami that one time as infants.

"For now, let's just see how it goes." Aqua said. "If we decide her ex will only be trouble in her life, we'll cry and say we hate him. That should ensure Ai cuts him out forever."

"Aren't there laws against that?" Ruby asked.

"Depends, but given the situation, he likely waived his parental rights. Which means that as far as the law is concerned, he is not our father. Even then, aside from the media backlash on him, he'd probably have to backpay four years of child support. There's no way he would try to fight against Ai with all that against him if he does turn out to be abusive."

"Awesome, now that that's done, I'm going back to mama." Ruby said, already letting all the responsibility fall on Aqua.

"Brat." He said out loud when she was out of earshot.

"Ruby!?" Ai screamed in concern as she noticed that the thing in her arms was not her daughter, but a pillow.

"Yea?" Her daughter sat up from her spot less than a meter from her.

"Oh." She breathed a sigh of relief. "Why am I cuddling a pillow?" She asked.

Ruby started to do her fake cry when she wanted attention again. Ai laughed as she realized maybe acting won't be her best career option when she gets older. Then again, as her mother she knew everything her baby girl was thinking.

"You pushed me away and grabbed the pillow." She fake sobbed, hoping to make Ai comfort her.

"Oh really?" Ai said, turning the act on its head.

"Yea, you don't love me anymore." Ruby sobbed again.

"Well, this pillow is so much more comfortable and better at cuddling. So, I decided I should try this." She smirked. "Maybe I should just hold this when I sleep from now on."

Ai almost broke character at her daughter's pout. Crocodile tears shifting into a scowl that would probably mean instant death if you looked at her too long.

"Come here." She laughed, putting the pillow down and holding out her arms. Ruby rushed in for a hug, though she was still upset at having her little joke flipped against her.

"You're mean mama." Ruby pouted.

"Yup, I'm as evil as they come." Ai joked while kissing the top of her daughter's head. "Come on, it's almost time to get ready. We'll have a lot of fun today at the concert."

"Yes!" Ruby screamed, running over to the washroom to bathe and get changed.

Ai normally didn't wash herself the morning of the concert since she was going to have to anyway when she arrived. The idols of B-Komachi always had to arrive hours early to wash, dress, apply makeup, and do last minute rehearsals before the big show.

Oh no... she remembered something from last night.

She invited Eren Yeager. The guy from next door after she talked with him. While she was excited to show him something he's never seen before, she did remember that she had to tell the President that she invited him and even gave him a backstage ticket. He was going to be very upset.

Oh well, it wasn't like Ai was a child anymore. She was 19-years-old now and a full-grown mother of two children. She could do whatever she wanted.

Ai got changed into her casual clothes so she would be ready to go to the concert when Miyako decided to pick them up.

Ai decided to wear something cute today for no particular reason. Looking at her wardrobe, she decided to put on a knee length black skirt with a white dress shirt. Due to the chilly weather, she also put on black leggings for warmth.

Aqua and Ruby put on casual clothes too. Mainly a pair of jeans and black sweater for Aqua and a cute dress and sweater for her daughter. She also had Ruby put on leggings since children typically get cold faster than adults so she can stay warm.

"When we finish breakfast, I'll go get Eren." She said.

"Who's Eren?" Aqua asked.

Oh right, she didn't tell her kids about the conversation last night since they fell asleep before it happened.

"He's our neighbor from next door." Ai explained. "We had a talk last night and I decided to give him a backstage pass."

"Isn't that a bad idea?" Aqua asked. "I know I said talk to him, but that's flat out admitting you're Hoshino Ai."

"Well, he already knew, kind of." She said, raising her eyebrow at another instance of her son being more intelligent than he should.

"And he'll keep our secret?" He asked again out of caution.

"Actually, he really didn't know who I was." Ai smiled.

"Really?" Ruby asked in surprise.

"Yup, not only that, but he's also never been to a concert before or even seen an idol." Ai explained.

"How can no one know what that is?" Ruby asked as if she got offended.

"I think he's from a rural part of overseas." She said. "They normally don't have access to the same things as we do. So, I'm going to invite him and show how amazing idols in Japan are." She made a cute pose in her idol act.

"So, he took the ticket?" Aqua asked.

"Actually, he refused it at first." She laughed.

"What!?" Ruby screamed. "How can he refuse it. It'll be so awesome. He's lucky to have it."

"Yea, but mama went in there and dragged him along." She laughed.

Aqua noticed something weird about the way Ai said that. Like she was disappointed about the way she was rejected but also somewhat proud of herself for taking the leap and almost forcing him to go. Aqua was wondering if the young idol was developing a crush on the stranger.

Honestly, he shouldn't be surprised. He's surprised it took so long to happen. Ai is still human and although he knew she loved her children, even if she would never say it, she still wanted to love someone that would make her feel like a woman. He didn't know the relationship she had with her ex, but Ai was clearly starved for companionship from someone other than her boss and children.

Aqua wondered if maybe this would be good for her. A chance to meet someone who can take care of her a little bit instead of her always being the one caring for them. Even if it ends up being a short relationship, Ai does deserve a chance to have a little romance after four years of nothing.

It was also kind of sad, since throughout the best years of her teenage life, she's been almost isolated from the world and unable to really form any kind of bonds with anyone outside of her children and work.

Knock Knock

Ai heard from the front door. She was a little unsure of who it could be. Miyako was still an hour away and she didn't give Eren a time to come over. She wondered if he decided to come over himself, but for some reason that didn't sound like something he would do.

"I'll get it." Ai said as she lightly jogged over to the door, ready to open it.

However, she stopped before she reached the door. She remembered what the President said. How he didn't want her opening the door at all, especially if it was for Eren. She wondered if even now she should follow that advice, but she wasn't too sure

about it. After all, she was already inviting him over anyway and having him come to a concert. So it's only natural that he would want to come over.

Why did she even care exactly? She's a full-grown woman and should be able to make her own judgements on strangers. Eren didn't seem like a bad person so it's unfair to treat him in any specific way without first really getting to know him. She understands President Saitou's concerns, but Eren is fully aware of her identity. Even if he doesn't know exactly who she is, he knows her name and knows she's an idol. There is no hiding from him.

Knock! Knock! Kock!

Ai jumped slightly while she was paused near the door. Those last knocks sounded violent, like whoever was at the door was getting frustrated. It struck her as odd since based on what she gathered from Eren; he didn't seem like the type to come over without being prompted. He also probably wouldn't get frustrated if she didn't answer.

But that's only her assumption of him and she hasn't spent nearly enough time getting to know him.

KNOCK! KNOCK! KNOCK!

Now the banging was getting louder. Whoever was there was getting frustrated that she wasn't answering. She knew that neither Miyako or the President would get frustrated like that and it honestly kind of scared her.

She decided that she wouldn't answer the door and walked back towards her kids.

"Who was that mama?" Ruby asked.

"I don't know, but President Saitou said he doesn't want me opening the door for anyone but them." She said, the loud banging still

making her heart flutter.

If it wasn't for her pause, she may have opened the door before whoever was there got frustrated. But something about those frustrated knockings just worried her.

Aid didn't like violence in any form, especially directed at her. There was just something odd about those knocks that scared her because it sounded aggressive. It brought up things in her past that she didn't want to think about and wanted to just avoid.

"So, are we going to eat?" Ruby asked. Ai smiled at her daughter for helping her mind calm down from the sudden scare.

"Yes, do you want salted salmon again?" She asked as her daughter cheered.

Aqua though was cautious. He didn't like how violent the person got on the other side of the door was getting. He knew from experience that whoever was there, got frustrated when she didn't answer. He wondered if it was this Eren guy, but it didn't make too much sense since apparently Ai had to almost drag him to the concert.

Could it be their father? It was likely, especially if he went with the idea that her ex was abusive, but he would have probably called first since if Ai was willing to share an address, she'd be willing to share her phone number as well.

Maybe Eren leaked something and that was a fan? He guessed that was the most probable scenario, but he didn't want to make assumptions without first talking with him. Not that he fully could talk to Eren, since as far as everyone was concerned, he's a four-year-old. Ai might just make light of his worries and chalk it up to the cuteness of a child.

He hated being a kid sometimes.

A Few Minutes Prior

Eren was dressed in the only clothing he had once again. Last night he got them washed while he was in the bath so they smelled fresh and clean for today.

He wasn't really excited about going to this concert, but his hand was kind of forced to by that girl. Ai she said her name was. It's a strange name, even by Hizuru standards. Then again, Eren hadn't met many Hizuru people before, so he guessed it was possible it was more common than he thought.

The girl was still weird to him. She did that act again and when he called her out on it, she said she wouldn't do it again. It confirms to him that she is being disingenuous in how she's acting and making a whole fake persona. He had no idea why she does that, but he really didn't care.

If Eren wanted to, he could just leave for a few hours so she can't find him, and it would force her to leave without him. He really considered it, but he also felt bad about how sad she got last night. She looked really hurt when he said no, and he wasn't fully sure why.

So, if nothing else than to make her happy, he decided he would go along with it.

Eren went outside to get some fresh air before they went. He didn't exactly know when the event was, so he'd wait for her to come to him. After all, she was the one who practically dragged him to the event, so he'd just go on her timeline.

Eren took up his spot near the fence that he normally went when he wanted some alone time. It almost became a kind of ritual to come out to this spot to think. It was away from the apartments but still within view of it. It gave him space to think.

Thinking back on it, Eren hasn't really left the apartment much except on the two occasions with Sergei. The man seemed like he

was frustrated so Eren wondered if he would call again for another job. Especially with how he felt Eren screwed up that last one, Eren wondered if he was out of a job. He didn't even get paid on the last one.

Eren has a month to figure it out, so he wasn't too worried right now. Especially if he rations his money, he could maybe go two months before going back onto the streets.

Eren noticed a guy walk up to Ai's apartment door. He was dressed in a hoodie and wearing simple jeans. His face was obscured by the hood, but he was holding flowers in his hand. Ai was a single mother, so it would make sense that there was at least a father in those kids' life. Or maybe he was a boyfriend to her. Eren truly didn't know. The guy seemed a bit suspicious, but who is Eren to judge?

After getting frustrated, the man walked away from the door. Ai either wasn't home or unable to open the door. The hooded man walked by him before noticing Eren.

"Hey, do you know who lives there?" He asked, pointing at ai's door.

"No." Eren said.

So, he wasn't affiliated with Ai. Eren knew this apartment was for people who didn't want to be traced, so out of respect for Ai's privacy he wouldn't say anything about it.

"Can you help me look for someone?" He asked. "I heard a friend of mine was here, but I don't know exactly."

"No." Eren said, wanting the guy to leave.

"It's really important, it's someone I care about." He tried again.

Eren ignored him and chose to go away. Eren walked past the man and went towards his own apartment door, keeping his senses directed at the man in case he tried anything. Eren did not care what

he needed. Whatever reason Ai is trying to stay untraceable is her own business and Eren had no right or care to tell anyone where she was.

One odd thing he did notice is the man's frustration. He was looking for someone and was getting frustrated at not finding that person. Maybe he got the wrong address and isn't looking for Ai, but it was none of Eren's business.

He went back inside and laid down on his bed, ready to take a small nap before this concert thing.

"Ok, ready!" Ai said with a fist pump in her apartment. Miyako shook her head at the display but was glad Ai was getting motivated for the show.

"Once we get there, you and the other girls start getting ready." Miyako said, parroting what her husband told her. "Once you are, he won't do one more rehearsal before the event."

"Ok, before I go, I need to get Eren." Ai said, already knowing how Miyako was going to react.

"Eren?" Miyako asked.

Ai didn't say anything as she rushed outside the door and knocked on Eren's door. Miyako had a shocked expressions since she knew exactly who lived in that room. How is she on a named basis already? It's only been not even a full day. They should have had no time to talk!

" *Hey Eren!* " Ai said in her idol voice and pose as he entered the door, though slightly different since she was saying it in English.

Eren was wearing the same clothes he always did, though his hood was down, and his hair was actually somewhat styled.

" I like your hair. " Ai said. " The disheveled bun looks good on you. "

"Y ou're going to still do that act? " Eren asked, though slightly annoyed.

" Yup. " Ai stuck her tongue out at him. " Like I said, you're getting the full idol experience. " She winked.

Miyako bent down to pick up her purse, which fell down after she saw the interaction. Idol experience? What was she talking about?

" Oh yea, this is Miyako. She's the wife of President Saitou of B-Komachi idol group. " She introduced.

"Ai!" Miyako screamed. "What is wrong with you!? You can't just tell this guy everything!" She yelled in Japanese.

"It's ok Miyako-San." Ai waived off. "We spoke last night when you guys left."

"Ichigo said don't talk to him!" She yelled, before realizing he was right there. "No offense." She said, hoping not to offend the foreigner.

Eren just stood still and raised an eyebrow when Miyako addressed him. As if he didn't understand what she said.

"Eren doesn't know Japanese." Ai explained.

"Oh." Miyako said. "But still we told you not to talk to him."

"Actually, President said not to open the door for him." She said while wagging her fingers.

"Damn it girl, you know specifically what he meant!" She yelled. "Now he knows for a fact who you are!"

"Actually, he doesn't." Ai said. "Eren grew up in a rural town and never saw an idol group or a concert. So I decided to invite him. He's real excited, right Eren-San?" She said, looking at Eren.

Eren looked at her and said nothing, though he looked more confused than anything.

"Oh, right, sorry." Ai said, remembering she was speaking Japanese.
" *I said you're excited to go to the concert to Miyako-San, right?* "
She switched to English.

Eren shrugged.

Miyako again let her jaw drop. A halfhearted shrug at being asked if he's excited to go to a Hoshino Ai concert? That's it?

" *Oh, and you need to meet my babies.* " Ai said excitedly.

Meet!? Ai, abort! You're telling him too much!

" *This little guy is Aqua, and she's Ruby.* " She said, introducing the twins.

" *Why'd you choose those names?* " Eren asked. The words actually sounded vaguely familiar. It was different, but it sounded similar to words in Eldian.

" *Well, his full name is Aquamarine, since that's the color of his eyes.* "
She said, letting Eren see her kids a little closer. " *And of course, you have Ruby for her eyes as well.* " She said.

Aqua looked indifferent at meeting Eren, while Ruby looked unsure.

"Kids, this is Eren Yeager. He's a westerner so they put family name in front." She said to her kids. " *They don't speak English yet so they may not understand.* "

"Hi Yeager-San!" Ruby said excitedly, trusting that a friend of mama's will be a friend of hers.

"Hi." Aqua said.

While Ruby didn't know English, Aqua did. However, he knew he had to hide it since it would be almost impossible to explain why he knew English when his mother never taught him.

Eren waved his own hand but didn't say anything. He really wasn't too comfortable being around the family right now, but he decided he'd try to bear it for now.

" So you can get the front seat with Miyako-San while I'll be in the back with my kids. " Ai said.

"Who said he's getting into my car? Miyako asked.

"Oh, I think my throat is starting to hurt." Ai faked in an innocent way.

Miyako shook her head at the display, knowing that she was just playing around but also that she was serious about Eren coming.

"Fine Ai, by all means let the stranger come to your concert." She said.

Eren got into the front passenger seat while everyone else got in their respective seats. Ai took a moment to make sure her kids were strapped into their seats and their seat belts were secured before giving the thumbs up to Miyako to start driving.

Eren leaned against the window as they started driving away, not really interested in starting a conversation with the older woman who clearly did not like him. She seemed to not like him for some reason.

" So Eren, where are you from? " Miyako asked.

" I'm from across the sea. " He replied cryptically. *" In a rural town. "*

" Does this town have a name? " She asked.

Eren remained silent at that, still not really wanting to talk to the older woman.

"Don't be so nosy Miyako-San." Ai said. "Eren is allowed to have some privacy."

This caused Miyako to grumble at her response.

" You'll enjoy the concert. " Ai said to Eren. *" It'll be one of the biggest I've done so far. And there will even be a little meet the idol event right after for all the fans. Maybe I'll give you an autograph if you come. "* She winked at Eren, even though he didn't see her.

" How many fans do you have? " Eren asked.

" Well, President Saitou said if we keep this pace up, in another month or two I'll be close to one million followers on Twitter. " She said proudly.

" Twitter? " Eren asked.

" Yea, you know. " Ai said. *" Twitter on social media. "*

" What's that? " Eren asked.

Miyako glanced at Eren in confusion. How does he not know what social media is? She didn't think anyone outside of isolated tribes didn't know what social media was.

" How don't you know? " Ai asked.

" Like I said, my home was somewhat isolated. " Eren explained again. *" We didn't have much in the way of technology. "*

Miyako was confused again. There he goes being vague and using non-specific terms to describe his home.

" Well, it's on the internet. It's a website where people can share videos, thoughts, and follow other people. " She explained, though Ai was still confused why he didn't know that.

Aqua was also confused. He couldn't voice his thoughts since the conversation was in English, but who doesn't know about social media? Even rural areas had computers, phones, and even public libraries with computers.

Eren, although he didn't know what the internet was, decided not to ask any more questions since he could tell he was making himself stand out more than he wanted to.

" *So, these fans of yours, they follow you and do what exactly?* " Eren asked.

" *Well, as an idol it's my job to entertain them. So basically, I sing, dance, act, or do whatever I can to impress them and make them happy.* " She tried to explain.

" *Is that why you act like the way you do?* " Eren asked.

" *What do you mean?* " Ai asked.

" *The way you act. That weird kind of cute thing you do. Is that why?* " He clarified.

Miyako was actually surprised at that answer. Most people don't fully realize that the idol personality is an act that's meant to create a very specific persona. She was surprised someone who doesn't know what an idol is was able to see through her act. Especially with how good Ai is at it.

" *Well, yes.* " Ai said. " *It's basically a way for me to create a persona in order to be popular and help the President get money.* "

" *Why do it?* " Eren asked.

Ai put her finger to her chin for a moment before smiling again.

" *I do it because I enjoy it. I love making people happy and making them smile.* " She said, though Eren could tell that it was only partially true.

" *Guess it's a good reason.* " Eren said, still not fully understanding it.

" *You'll see once we do the show.* " Ai said. " *I'll make you a fan of idol after just one show. Wait and see.* " She smiled.

" *What about you Eren?* " Miyako asked. " *What do you do?* "

" *I'm a mover.* " Eren said.

" *What kind of things do you move?* " She wanted to clarify.

" *Antiques.* " He said.

She was worried for Ai again. He's a mystery. The way he just deflects questions or speaks so vaguely about himself makes him a mysterious man. Add to that, being covered in muscles and having that exotic western look, she knew Ai was going to easily fall for him.

" *I'd like to see some of the stuff you move.* " Ai said, going along with the conversation.

Miyako wasn't sure if Ai was oblivious to how vague he was being or she just didn't mention it because she found it attractive. She could already tell Ai had a crush on him, and it honestly worried her.

There were so many red flags she noticed when Eren talked. Red flags that Ai was ignoring because she found him attractive. He's mysterious, and that brings a certain level of attractiveness, but she was also worried because that could bring other issues as well. He was clearly hiding something.

Ai and Eren continued to talk for the rest of the trip. Though mainly it turned into Ai hyping up an idol concert since Eren didn't really answer many questions. He was content to just listen to Ai explain in detail about her profession. It was honestly the first time she saw Ai enthusiastically explain her job. She looked really happy as she told him all the details and some of the downsides about it, such as all the makeup.

Though she didn't talk about the problems, such as crazed fans and having to maintain her idol personality at all times. She didn't blame Ai, since it wasn't a topic she wished to discuss to anyone. She always tried to focus on the benefits of being an idol since the drawbacks were extremely tough for her to endure.

Eren though, he honestly enjoyed talking with Ai. He still could barely understand half of what she was saying, but he enjoyed hearing her talk about it. She had so much passion and he could see her fake personality slipping as she expressed herself. Her personality went from overly cute for the sake of being cute, to just a girl explaining her favorite career passionately.

Miyako noticed it as well. Ai was acting as if she was around herself or her husband. She was just being a normal young woman right now. A young woman who spoke passionately about the thing she loved. She could even tell Eren was being sincere in his own enjoyment from just listening to her. He didn't talk much outside of simple responses, but she could tell he found Ai cute when she was passionate.

Miyako joked to herself if she needed to get some diapers ready again, because she was worried what would happen if those two continued to talk in the following days.

So, there's another chapter.

I'll be honest, I actually had a few ideas on how I wanted Ai and Eren to get along at first. At first, I thought about the tried and true save her from muggers or from getting hit by a car. But I felt like it took the agency out of their actions since it kind of forces them to get along. Instead, I just decided a simple talk. Ai had to work for it, especially when she got rejected.

I'm really glad it seems I made the right call lol.

Thanks for the reviews so far. It really lets me know how I'm doing and if I've been making the right choices.

Also, the laws regarding fathers, kind of basing it off of American law since I am not even going to try to talk on it about Japanese law lol. So I apologize if I'm wrong on that lol.

This is a Concert?

Chapter 7: This is a Concert?

Miyako parked her car right behind the concert building. There was a simple parking lot that lead into the back of the building where only VIPs, staff, and of course Ai herself were allowed to enter. This ensured that Ai would be able to have plenty of time to prepare for the upcoming event.

She got out and ushered Ai and the kids to get out next. She wanted Ai to have a chance to explain to Ichigo about their... VIP that has tagged along because of Ai. Ai was busy making sure her kids were able to get out of the seatbelt and the car since they were still pretty young.

Eren stepped out of the car as well and followed with them. He kept a respectful distance since he didn't want to interfere with their job and wanted to make sure Ai had the room she needed to prepare.

He noticed she covered herself throughout the trip, much like when he first saw her. He was a little confused as to why she did that. He could tell she was using a disguise but was unsure of why. Since she apparently has so many people who love her and she enjoys this job, wouldn't it make more sense for her to want to be seen in public?

She said she was an actor as well, but Eren had no real concept of what that was. He only ever saw a single play in his life when he was a kid in Shiganshina. However, it was only in the market area and only attracted a few people.

Eren knew from his dad's memories of moving picture shows in Marley. He never had the time to see them himself, but he knew a bit of them. He knew people acted in this picture shows like in a play,

but his father never even saw one since he spent most of his life in the internment zone.

After entering the building, the group made their way to the dressing room. Although Ai was the main star of B-Komachi, she was still a single member of a seven-member group, so she changed in a single room with the other girls.

Ai was always the first to arrive since she was the only one escorted by Miyako. The dressing room was just a large room that had small vanity areas for each girl to prepare their hair and makeup. After a little while, there would be additional staff in order to help stylize and do their hair for the big show. A locker room was also in the back, which allowed the women some privacy while getting into their outfits.

" So this is the area we get ready at. " Ai said as she showed Eren their changing room. " We have to make sure our makeup and hair are absolutely perfect for the show. So we normally have a whole team of stylists working on us. "

" Us? " Eren asked.

" Oh right, I never told you about our group! " She did that weird bonk on her head again.

Ai took out a picture from her vanity area that had all the members of the group. Unlike most pictures, this had a picture of them all at an amusement park so they were dressed in normal clothes and disguises. Though for the picture, they took the disguises off for a moment to get the group together.

" This is our main group, B-Komachi. " Ai said, showing Eren the picture. " We're a team who perform together. But really it takes the talents of every member to make the shows as good as they are. " Ai said, trying to put more credit on others besides herself.

" All women? " Eren asked.

" Well, of course. Who else would be perfect for cute performances. "
She laughed. *" You have Nino, Watanabe, Takamine, Kyun, Ari, Meimei, and of course me. "* She posed with both of her peace signs.

Eren noticed that she was getting back into her persona again. It still looked weird to him, but instead of being creeped out, he understood that it was for her profession and she was mainly doing it to give him the full experience. Though he still preferred it if she just acted normal.

" To be honest, I always felt that the others had more talent than me. "
" Her persona broke a little as she sounded sad. " I wish they would get more credit, because even though we're a team, I always end up being the most popular. "

" You're the most popular? " Eren asked.

" Yea. " Ai said, her persona coming back. " Though it's mainly my cute face. I feel like if I looked different than Meimei would be more popular. Which goes to show how amazing the stylists and makeup artists are. "

" Who are the other members? " Eren asked.

" If I had to pick the best dancer, it would be Meimei. " Ai said, pointing to the woman with a bob cut. " She always moves with such grace that I find myself struggling to keep up. Then you have our best singers, Ari and Kyun. Nino, Watanabe, and Takamine are some of our cutest girls. They are some of the ones who do the most interviews. "

Right as she finished explaining her friends, they heard the door slam open to reveal the President. He was out of breath from the run after Miyako told him about their surprise guest.

"Oh, hi President Saitou." Ai waved when she saw him, having to turn her cute personality up since she knew she was in trouble.

"What did I say!?" He yelled. "I asked you to do one thing!"

"I didn't open the door for him." She said sheepishly.

Miyako just put a hand over her face when she said that.

"Look, we can't have him here and going around like this. What happens if he gets seen? Do you know what kind of controversy it would be if a reporter saw some weird guy backstage!?" He asked, before realizing that the stranger was in the room with them.

Eren stood with his arms crossed and was impressively tall. Ichigo actually got worried that he might try something after the older man basically just insulted him to his face.

"Uh... sorry." He said after a pause. Ichigo started to sweat when Eren didn't reply.

"He doesn't know Japanese." Ai laughed as the president breathed a sigh of relief.

"Ai, follow me." He said, motioning for Ai.

" *Well, I'm in trouble.* " Ai laughed at Eren.

" *Why?* " Eren asked.

" *Technically we're not allowed to bring random people backstage, so I kind of broke a rule.* " She explained.

" *Will you be ok?* " Eren asked.

Ai's heart fluttered for a moment when he asked that.

" *Are you worried about me?* " She teased, hoping to maybe get him to joke a bit.

" Yes. " Eren said, making Ai almost fall from how blunt his response was. " *I wouldn't want to cost you your job since you have two kids to*

care for. "

Ai took a quick breath at the rollercoaster of emotion she just felt. Of course, he's just worried for the kids. No other meaning behind that. Though now she knows he is not one to joke around. Which was kind of cute in a way.

" Don't worry, I make him the most money, so he won't fire me. " She laughed. " Though if something happened to me, I'm sure he'd recover easily. "

"Ai." Ichigo reminded.

"Coming." She laughed. *" I'll be right back. "* She said.

After getting her alone in his makeshift office for the concert, Ichigo motioned for the room right next to him. All he did was make a sound as he gestured to where Eren was, though Ai could tell he was upset.

"I'm guessing you're upset." She said with a smile.

"Yes!" Ichigo yelled. "Do you have any idea the things we do to keep you protected!?" He yelled. "I ask you to not talk to the guy. And before you say anything, you know the spirit of what I asked for so don't try to say you didn't open the door."

Ai shut her mouth; her excuse now no longer valid.

"Ai, he's a stranger." Ichigo said.

"No, his name is Eren." She clarified for him.

"What?" Ichigo asked, not used to being challenged by one of his idols.

"His name." Ai clarified again. "It's Eren. Not stranger, not weird guy, or anything like that. His name is Eren Yeager and he's just a regular person."

"I get that, but we don't know his intentions." Ichigo said.

"Did you try talking to him to figure out what his intentions are?" Ai asked.

"Well-" Ichigo tried.

"No, you didn't." Ai said, crossing her arms when she said that. "He doesn't even care about idols. I actually had to drag him here because he actually rejected the ticket at first. He doesn't know anything about Japanese idols and he's not trying to use me or anything."

"You only talked last night." Ichigo said.

"Yes, and if he wanted to do something he would have by now." Ai said. "The moment he learned my name he could have tried to blackmail me or threaten me. Instead, he was nice and didn't do any of that. It's not fair how you just insult him behind his back when he did nothing."

"That's not what I'm trying to do." Ichigo said.

"Besides, if anything does happen to me, you'll be fine." She said. "You're really smart and able to recognize talent better than any of us. If I lose my career, it'll be fine. But it's not fair to just push people away when they did nothing to us."

"I'm trying to protect you, Ai." Ichigo said.

"I know." She said quietly, her voice starting to waiver and tears starting to show in her eyes.

"Ai..." Ichigo began.

"I can never repay you enough for what you did for me." She said sadly. "You gave me my career and helped me through so much after my pregnancy. You did so much and didn't ask anything back from me besides my dedication."

Ai put both hands over her face as a few tears started to fall down her cheeks. Ichigo had only intended to scare her a bit to get her to kick Eren out, but he didn't want to make her sad.

"But is it unfair of me to want to meet new people? To have friends other than my children and you guys?" She asked behind her hands. "Is it unfair to just be a person for once and maybe have a fun time with someone new?"

Ichigo was silent. A part of him wanted to bring up her ex but he knew if he did it would really upset her.

Ichigo really cared for Ai. As painful as it was to say, Ai was more important to him than any other idol member in the group. He basically raised her since she was twelve when he first scouted her. More than anything, he couldn't help but see her as a daughter.

Ichigo had no doubt he could recover if Ai suddenly left, either due to controversy or her own choice. But the thought of a guy being able to manipulate her after knowing her secrets terrified him. He didn't want her to get hurt again and be settled with another set of kids after getting abandoned.

"Look Ai, I'm sorry." Ichigo said. "And I think you're right." She's not, he said to himself. "But please understand how dangerous it is. Please understand that we're only trying to help you."

"I know." She said, trying to stop the tears as they came down.

"But you're right in that we shouldn't judge him without giving him a chance." He said, though still believed she was wrong on that front. "But you're also right that we can't just lock you away either." That was the only point he agreed with. "So, we'll give him a chance. But you need to promise us that if anything happens, you'll let us know."

Ai nodded when he said that. She took a breath and suddenly smiled at him, the tears mostly gone though still needed to be washed away.

"Of course." She said, any trace of sadness gone.

Most people would assume that was an act. That her tears were fake due to her acting skills. Though the truth was that her tears were real, and this sudden change in behavior was the act. After knowing her and basically raising her, he knew when she was acting and when she was genuine.

"Go wash up and get ready." Ichigo said. "We'll talk more tomorrow."

Ai nodded and went to the washroom to freshen herself up before going back to getting changed.

When Ai got back into the changing room, she saw Eren swarmed by all the other members of B-Komachi. They were asking him a lot of questions about himself, though he seemed very uncomfortable.

" So, you just move things? " Memei laughed. *" That sounds so normal. "*

"Ask him how he gets his hair like that." Ari asked. "How do you make it so messy but look so good?"

Only Ai and Meimei had good enough English to actually have a conversation with a foreigner, so she ended up translating for the group.

" She asked how you get your hair like that. " Meimei translated.

" Water? " Eren replied.

" Oh come on, that's such a boring answer. " She giggled. *" For you to look that good, you need to be doing something. "*

Ai stood at the doorway with a slightly annoyed look on her face. She didn't want the other members of the group to ask him any questions that she didn't know the answer yet.

"Oh, Ai. There you are." Meimei said. "We didn't know you got a boyfriend. How scandalous." She giggled to herself.

"He's not." Ai replied as she giggled too.

"Oh come on." Ari said. "Why else would you bring this guy here. He's so handsome."

"He never saw a concert so I'm helping him.

"EH!" all the girls yelled.

"How have you not seen one!?" Nino asked.

"Yea, that's such a travesty!" Watanabe asked as well.

Eren stepped back at all the women who suddenly ganged up around him, unsure of what was going on. Were they mad about something?

"Girls, he doesn't know Japanese." Meimei replied. " *They're asking how you never saw a concert.* "

" *I just didn't.* " Eren replied.

"He's from a rural town." Ai said, hoping to get the girls away from him. "So, when I heard that I had to bring him." She smiled.

All the other girls looked at Ai when she said that. They could see the genuine look on her face. All the girls knew when each of them was being honest or in their persona's, but right now they could tell Ai was genuinely smiling.

"Miyako-San was right." Meimei said.

"Eh?" Ai asked.

"Yup, we're doomed." Ari said.

"Why are we doomed?" Ai asked.

"Tall, handsome, mysterious. Ai doesn't have a chance." Nino said.

"What's that mean?" Ai tried again.

"But if he tries anything to you, just let us know." Watanabe said.

All the girls went to their vanity areas in order to get ready. Ai just stood there unable to fully understand what was going on.

" *They're interesting.* " Eren said sarcastically.

" *Well, they're my friends so what can you expect?* " Ai laughed. "
Want to see me get ready? " Ai said.

"Ai!" Memei overheard.

"Makeup Memei! Makeup!" She clarified.

Ai sat down as she began applying her makeup to her face. She began to explain to Eren all the different ways they had to get ready for the concert. In Japanese culture, makeup was seen as kind of a bad thing, so the makeup they wore was very subtle and mainly used to either accentuate their eyes or hide any kind of imperfections.

After a while, her hair stylist came in and began working on her hair, ensuring that there was a covering around her face to prevent the hair from ruining her makeup while she was having her hair done. The hair stylist also cut some ends of Ai's hair in order to ensure it was perfectly shaped since her hair grew a bit and was un-even now.

All in all, it was a process that took maybe an hour to complete. Ai was still in her regular clothes, but her face looked exactly how she was supposed to look for the upcoming concert.

" *What do you think?* " She said, sticking her tongue out at Eren while winking.

Eren didn't know what to think. Makeup wasn't really a thing he was familiar with. There were some makeup types used by the royalty prior to the overthrow of the false king of the walls, but no one outside of specific families in the interior ever used makeup.

" *It looks weird.* " He said honestly.

" *How so?* " Ai asked.

" *I don't know, you just don't look the same.* " He said. " *Like suddenly you're even more different now than before.* "

" *That's a weird way of putting it.* " Ai said. " *Haven't you had any women you knew who wore makeup?* "

" *No.* " Eren said honestly. " *I never saw makeup until I came to Japan.* "

Just another strange thing about him. Ai figured there was no way he could be from the United States or any first world European country, From his lack of understanding of modern technology and even now he claimed he never saw makeup. It was so odd to her, but there was something interesting about his perspective. She never met anyone who didn't obsess over idols in some way.

" *Well, just wait till the look is complete.* " Ai said as she stood up to go to the locker room in order to change into her idol outfit. " *Once you see it, you'll start to understand why idols are so amazing.* "

Miyako heard the exchange from where she stood. She was completely amazed at how hard Ai was trying to make this man enjoy idols. He really had no clue or interest, but Ai was doing everything she could to make him a fan of hers.

Ai went into the locker room with the rest of the girls. They were all in various stages of undressing to get into their idol outfits. Ai went over to her own locker and opened it, showing her classic outfit.

Getting into the idol outfit was a little challenging for her since she had to be careful not to disturb her makeup or her hair. It was important to do this last since during the hairstyling and makeup process they could accidentally stain the outfits. It was easier to fix a bit of blush than remove a stain from clothes.

Ai thought back to Eren's words. He really seemed to not care about anything related to idols. He just seemed indifferent to everything she tried to show him. It made her sad but also frustrated her. He was like a puzzle she couldn't solve and someone that she wanted to really show the best parts of idols and entertainment.

However, so far nothing seemed to interest him. He listened to her out of respect, but he never showed any interest outside of just trying to learn about it. She never had such a hard time making someone a fan of hers.

After she was finished, Ai went back into the dressing room and saw Eren sitting in the corner. She giggled slightly at how uncomfortable he seemed since besides Miyako and Meimei, no one else understood English. And with Meimei in the locker room and Miyako not particularly liking him, he was just kind of in the corner.

"What do you think?" She posed.

Eren raised his eyebrow as he scanned her body from her feet to her head. It kind of made Ai blush at how intensely he stared at her.

For Eren, he supposed it looked interesting. There was an abundance of symbols like hearts and stars all over her costume, as well as mainly having light red and pink tones to it.

" *You don't look all that different to me.* " Eren said.

" *Not at all?* " Ai asked, getting sad again.

Eren couldn't understand why she kept getting sad. He just didn't understand what the big deal was.

" I mean, all of your outfits look different to what I was used to growing up. " He clarified. *" What you wore earlier honestly just has the same general look to it. You look pretty in this outfit and the previous one. "* He shrugged.

Ai blushed again a bit at being called pretty. He considered both ways of dressing to be cute on her, which must have been his weird way of saying she looked cute no matter what she wore.

"Alright girls." The president came into the room. "We have an hour before curtains up, so we'll do a quick rehearsal in order to make sure there are no issues."

All the girls nodded at that and finished their final touches on their hair, makeup, and outfits.

" Well, time for me to go. " Ai said. *" Just you wait, in an hour you'll see the best show you could imagine. "* She smiled.

" Sure. " Eren said, not sure what to expect.

As the curtain raised and the show started up, Eren watched from the VIP seats at how strange these kinds of shows were.

There were so many people in the stands, all with weird glowing sticks that they waved in the air, chanting the names of whatever idols they found most interesting. There were more people here than Eren ever saw in one place in his life.

There were so many lights that he was amazed they weren't blinded up on stage. Some lights seemed like normal lights, however there were so many cones and columns of light that flashed in a variety of colors. It looked completely alien to the young Eldian.

As the music started playing, Eren could honestly say he didn't like it.

Eren never really experienced music in his life. His family lived in a very humble part of Shiganshina and he was never able to enjoy any actual performances within the walls while he was in the military. There were times when he heard performers on the streets, but they were nothing like this.

He honestly couldn't even fully place what instruments made the sounds. It seemed so fast paced and loud.

So very loud in fact. Eren was actually having to cover his ears from the sheer volume. Being a titan shifter was both a blessing and a curse. While other members of the military slowly had their hearing damaged from the thunder spears and guns that were fired around them, Eren always had his hearing restored to one hundred percent. So every single time a gunshot was fired, it felt like a fresh round of ringing in his ears every single time.

Even though his powers were gone, his ears were still as fresh as when he was a kid, meaning that the noise was even worse now. Granted, he probably did start to lose some hearing when he fired that gun on his first job, but not nearly enough to make the noise on stage any more bearable.

He could barely stand the noise that he had to keep his hands over his ears nearly the whole time.

The dancing though was unique. Eren never saw any kind of dancing moves like that. Ai moved around with precision and grace that he actually found himself drawn to her body as she moved.

However, the main reason he didn't like the show was because it reminded him of the one play he actually attended in his life. That being, Willy Tybur's declaration of war on the Island of Paradis.

While much more intense, the overall presentation reminded him of the play that Willy Tybur put on in his attempt to unite the world against Paradis. The lights, presence, and design of the stage were all similar. They were just much more advanced. All it did was bring

back memories of the assault on the Liberio Internment Zone, which was the first time Eren specifically targeted and killed innocent people.

He was reminded of the beginning events that led to his coup against the MPs and being made to lie to his friends and family. How it was the catalyst to beginning the rumbling and destroying most of the world.

Eren never wanted to attend one of these ever again.

Eren met with Ai after the show backstage. Her and the other girls were sweating and breathing heavily from the dancing and excitement in the show. She took a towel and wiped her face a bit, though trying hard not to ruin her makeup.

However, she wanted to see Eren to see what his reaction was. He must have loved it. Especially since Ai poured her heart and soul into that performance so she could show him how amazing it was. She hoped that now Eren would be made a fan of idol groups and enjoy the music from now on. Maybe he'll want her autograph.

She blushed as she imagined signing it for him.

" *What did you think?* " She said, running up to Eren.

" *I didn't like it.* " In just four words, Eren destroyed any joy she felt at the performance.

He didn't like it? As in, instead of just being indifferent to it, he said he didn't like it at all? That he wasn't interested in her performance at all?

" *Really?* " She asked, getting sad again.

" *It was unusual and loud.* " He said. " *I couldn't even hear myself think, plus I just don't like those kinds of shows.* "

" Oh. " She said again. " *Well, if that's the case I'm glad you came anyway.* " She said sadly. " *I'm sorry if I dragged you here when you really didn't want to come.* "

Eren cocked his head at the response.

" *What's wrong?* " He asked.

" *Wrong?* " Ai asked. " *Nothing, what makes you think anything is wrong?* " She tried to cover up her disappointment. " *I just wanted to make sure you had a good time.* " She smiled, though Eren could tell it was a fake one. " *I need to get ready for the autographs. I'll see you when I'm done.* "

As she walked away, Eren got confused about why she was so upset.

If there was one thing Eren enjoyed, it was the smile she had on her face during the performance. He can honestly say that, although he hated the concert, he enjoyed watching her dance and smile on stage. She really seemed happy to be there.

" *Wow, you're an idiot.* " Eren heard behind him.

" *Meme, right?* " He asked.

" *Meimei, though nice try.* " She said.

" *Everyone has been calling me an idiot since I got here.* " He said out loud, though not specifically to her.

" *I can see why.* " Meimei said.

Eren kept quiet, not interested in getting insulted and called an idiot by another person in this country.

" *Did you ever consider why Ai decided to bring you?* " She asked him.

" *She gave me a ticket, I figured she was being nice to her neighbor.*
" Eren guessed.

" *See, this is why everyone calls you an idiot.* " She face palmed.

" *You're saying she didn't?* " Eren asked.

" *The president is very particular about who we hang out with.* " Meimei began. " *Mostly for our own safety, which is why he's so cautious around you.* "

" *Safety?* " Eren asked. " *Why would you be in danger?* "

" *Because a lot of fans can get very obsessive and even violent against us.* " She said.

" *Why?* " Eren asked.

" *Ai was right, you really don't know anything.* " Meimei said. " *Idols are symbols of what's considered to be the perfect Japanese woman.* " She explained. " *We're meant to be pure, innocent, and kind at all times. Idols who fall in love are usually looked down upon. Some fans fall in love with idols so much they end up stalking or even attacking the idol out of anger or jealousy.* "

" *But why?* " Eren asked. " *Why do that?* "

" *Because they're obsessed with us.* " She said. " *And could you imagine what would happen if it's discovered that Ai has children?* "

" *What's wrong with that?* " Eren asked.

" *She's no longer pure. It is clear evidence that Ai slept with a man. Her fans would be angry, since now she is no longer available to them.* "

" *So, they'll attack her for such a stupid reason?* " Eren asked.

" Or unfollow her and refuse to see her shows, effectively ending her career. " Meimei explained. " But there have been instances of idols being attacked because of crazy obsessed fans who have the mentality of if they can't have her, no one can. "

" So, what does this have to do with me? " Eren asked.

" Ai put a lot of trust in you. She risked her reputation and safety to bring you here. " Meimei said. " She brought you here to show you something that she's passionate about and you just threw it in her face. "

" I didn't enjoy the concert, but I did enjoy her passion. " Eren said.

"Oh my god." Meimei face palmed again while switching to Japanese. "That sounds so freaking romantic."

" What? " Eren asked, not understanding what she said.

" Why didn't you say that? " Meimei asked. " She would have felt so much better. "

" I don't know. " Eren shrugged.

" Look, just forget it. " She said. " Do what you want. Be clueless and an idiot if that's what you want. "

Eren shrugged at her response. He seriously didn't understand why they were so upset with him. They wanted his opinion, and he gave it. What was the issue?

"Thank you for the gift." Ai said as she took a cute little drawing from one of her younger fans.

The girl who gave the the crude drawing was maybe five years old and was with her parents. She seemed so excited to meet her and Ai

felt so honored to be an idol to this young girl. She almost reminded her of Ruby with the way she looked at her with such awe.

Though, even as Ai and the others sat on the table in the meet room and autographed all the people's stuff that they were given, Ai felt really distracted.

Ai wondered why Eren didn't like the show. She was looking forward to his reaction the whole day. She was hoping for him to say something along the lines of praise or even amazement. To see that stoic face replaced with one of amazement.

"Wow Ai, this was so amazing! I'm glad you brought me here!" Eren said in excitement and gave her a warm smile. "Please can you sign this picture!"

"Of course Eren, I'm so glad to have you as my fan." Ai smiled and blushed as she took the picture and signed it.

However, that was nothing but a fantasy now. She didn't know why Eren hated it, but apparently, he did.

Maybe she was off her game today. Maybe she wasn't as good as she should have been today. She didn't feel sick. If anything, she felt like that was her best performance to date. Even her twitter is exploding in praise at such an amazing performance.

However, if Eren hated it, then maybe her fans were just saying things so as not to reveal that in reality she struggled today. Maybe if she put more soul and dedication into it, he would have enjoyed it more. Maybe if she rehearsed one more time, she'd make it even better so he would have enjoyed it.

Instead, she messed up and ruined Eren's first concert.

Eren stood off in the corner of the room, outside of Ai's field of vision. He could tell she was upset and wasn't all that focused on her fans. The other girls next to her seemed completely fine, but Ai just

seemed out of it. It was subtle, but he could tell her smile was being forced.

To be honest, Eren thought this whole time that she was being nice and handed him a ticket because of her generosity.

But now that Eren had the context of the situation from Meimei, he realized she really was just trying to impress him. He didn't fully know why though. Eren was just a stranger to her.

Even though Meimei said the sweet and innocent act was fake and not real, Eren could tell that she was all those things. She acted overly cute, but when she showed her real self, she was innocent and cute. Sure, she had sex before and had children, but she still had an innocence about her that was born from her own passion.

And now Eren realized he threw it back into her face.

Unfortunately for him, he couldn't tell her the main reason why he didn't like it. What should he say, that he was reminded of a play that declared war on his homeland and resulted in the near complete genocide of entire nations? Even if she could believe he was from another world, the sins he committed would instantly make her hate him.

Though could he blame her if she did hate him? He was a devil after all.

Eren decided to try and make this right. He went over to one of the merchandise stands and looked at what he should buy.

One picture that caught his eye was a picture of Ai in a white revealing suit that was sitting on a bench with the beach behind her. It had a strange bit of cloth on her shoulders, with a skintight suit that covered everything but her legs and arms. She looked very beautiful in that pose, but the location reminded him of the sea.

When he looked at it, he felt relaxed as he imagined going to this world's sea and gazing at it from the beach. This time though, there would be no enemies on the other side.

Eren paid for the picture and a frame to go with it. He got in line where so many other people, mostly men, waited to meet the idol group. It wasn't a surprise to see that Ai was the most popular as her line was the longest. Though Eren was determined to wait.

Ai didn't notice him until she looked up and saw him standing right in front of her pnce he got to the front of the line. She was in shock that he was here and even more so that he decided to get in line.

Eren handed her a picture of that one time she modeled for a swimsuit company. She blushed since of all the pictures he got, it happened to be her most revealing. Even though a one piece was hardly very revealing. Especially when her cleavage was covered by the cloth.

" I didn't like the show. " Eren explained. *" It's not music I like, and I had bad experiences with similar performances that brought back bad memories. "* He said honestly.

" Oh. " Ai said, not sure what to say.

" However, I admired your passion and dedication, so I'll take an autograph of whatever you call it. " He said.

Ai turned to Meimei, who was actually just as shocked as she was. With a shrug, Meimei just motioned for her to continue with the little exchange. Ai had to be careful to make sure she didn't seem like she personally knew Eren, but she was still happy he said what he did.

" Well, I am incredibly happy that even though you don't like the music, I was able to make you happy. " She said. "I love you." She winked, intentionally saying that in Japanese so as to avoid having Eren understand it. She was terrified of the thought of him hearing that, so she wanted to make sure he didn't understand her words.

After signing the picture, Eren walked off back to his spot backstage.

"He can be somewhat smooth when he tries." Meimei laughed at Ai's blush.

"What did he say?" Nino asked.

"Let's talk later." Ari said. "We still have three more hours of signing before we can think about it."

Ai agreed and went back to signing. She felt so much better now that Eren told her he enjoyed it for her. It made her feel special in a way no other fan made her. She hoped to get a chance to talk to him on the ride home some more.

I'll probably be gone for roughly a month with no access to my story, so I'll be unable to fully work on it. The next update may come out in a month or so, so there'll be a small pause.

Thanks again everyone for your kind words and criticisms.

We Have Concerns About Eren

Chapter 8: We Have Concerns About Eren

Ai got up from the Futon she borrowed from Meimei as she stretched herself to relieve some of the soreness from yesterday's performance. For some reason, she felt a lot sorer today than normal, which Miyako said was due to her performing harder than normal. She didn't really feel any different from the performance, but the soreness said otherwise.

Normally after a performance, the girls would go celebrate a job well done, either by going to a restaurant that the President would reserve in order to maintain their secrecy, or by going to one of each other's homes. Normally, they would go to Meimei's house since she had an actual house whereas the other girls had apartments.

"Morning Ai." Meimei said as she walked around the living room in her long pajama's. "Breakfast will be ready soon." She said, Ai now noticed she had an apron on over the pajama's.

"Mama..." Ruby moaned from Ai's arms. The movement woke her up and she was struggling to open her eyes and leave her restful sleep.

"Good morning Ruby-Chan." Ai said sweetly to her daughter.

The rest of the group knew about her children, it was impossible to hide from them. At first, they were a little upset at having to lose Ai while she gave birth and recovered, but they came to quickly accept it.

"Morning Ruby." Meimei smiled.

"Morning Mei-San." Ruby said in a tired voice.

"You best hurry, everyone else is awake." Meimei said.

"Oh, why didn't you wake me?" Ai asked.

"Because I couldn't bear the thought of waking up Ruby and Aqua from their sleep." She giggled. "You all look so cute."

Speaking of Aqua, he was again a very heavy sleeper, so he was lying next to Ai and wasn't even moving to get up.

Meimei knelt down next to him, her feet flat on the ground as she crouched all the way down to reach his prone form on the futon. She gave him a few gentle flicks on the ear to wake him up.

"Wake up Aqua-Chan." She said.

"Meimei, don't be so rough." Ai whined at how she was waking him.

Meimei laughed as his face scrunched up and swatted at her, much different than the cute and gentle reaction he had when Ai would wake him up. Meimei giggled at the reaction, she always loved teasing kids and watching their funny reactions. It was some very light teasing and she enjoyed seeing how frustrated he got sometimes.

"But he's a boy, he should be used to a bit of teasing." She laughed.

"Stop it." Aqua said in a tired voice, but he willed himself to sit up.

"There you go, awake and ready to eat." Meimei laughed.

Aqua glared at Meimei. When he was Goro, he did like the rest of the team from B Komachi, but Meimei always made it her mission to tease him as much as she could. He knew it was a lighthearted teasing, and if he was an adult and she was his girlfriend, he'd even kind of like it. But being a toddler and being treated in such always annoyed him to no end.

"I'm awake." He relented as he stood up.

Ai giggled at his reaction too. She could never tease her children like how Meimei did, but she still loved to see their reactions at the lighthearted play.

Aqua was the only boy in the house. The president normally didn't come during their celebrations since he was busy with postproduction management so Miyako would typically stay with the group of girls in order to make sure nothing happened. They all still were technically teenagers after all. He also had a strict no boy policy during their celebrations since he didn't want to risk his idols being influenced by both alcohol and hormones.

Aqua was the only exception since he was both a child and Ai's son, so he had the privilege of being the only boy that's surrounded by beautiful women. Ai giggled at the thought, how he'll one day grow up and realize he was too young to appreciate such a moment. Then again, with the way he looks and acts no, Ai wondered how popular he would get with girls. Her heart hardened for a moment when she imagined her innocent little boy surrounded by women in their sleeping clothes.

She had to protect him when he got older.

However, that also meant that Eren had to leave since there was no way he was permitting Eren to be anywhere near the girls outside of what was mandated by the ticket he had. Originally, Miyako offered to take him home, but he declined the offer since he said he already arranged for a ride home.

Ai was a little sad that she didn't get to see him off after signing the autograph, but she knew it wouldn't matter since they were neighbors.

Ai reached that dining area with her children and sat down with the rest of the women. Unlike most homes, Meimei's house had western styled furniture, such as a table that required the use of chairs. It wasn't uncommon in modern times for many homes or families to

have western styled stuff since western culture exploded in popularity in the past few decades.

"My husband had to go into work early, so he couldn't join." Meimei laughed.

It would probably surprise their fans if they ever found out that Meimei, the second most popular idol in B-Komachi, was married already. She had been for the past year in fact. Her husband was an older man who ran a successful restaurant over in the Ginza district of Tokyo. Ginza was one of the most populated areas in Tokyo and had much of the stores and famous restaurants there, so he was a very well-off man.

While the other girls would live paycheck to paycheck, Meimei was the only one who could actually live decently since her husband made so much. She often joked that if she didn't love being an idol so much, she'd quit and be a housewife instead.

"That's a shame." Ai said.

"It's ok." Meimei waved off. "He's often busy but you have to make money somehow." She said.

"So, we got a look at Eren yesterday." Ari began.

"I have to admit, he has some appeal to him." Watanabe laughed.

"Just wish we could actually talk." Nino said in annoyance. "Why can't English speakers ever learn Japanese? How can I find my western husband if we can't talk?"

"Or you could just learn English." Meimei said. "Since 90% of the world uses it as their second language."

"But it's so hard!" Nino whined. "There are so many rules, and they contradict each other."

"Eren's clearly new to Japan." Meimei said. "So, I wouldn't expect him to fully know, though if he's living here, you'd think he'd at least know something."

"Eren said he came from a rural area." Ai said. "So, this might be his first time in a foreign city."

"Did he ever actually say where he lived?" Meimei asked.

"No." Miyako interjected.

"Not at all?" Meimei asked the older woman.

"In fact, he goes out of his way to be as vague as possible." Miyako voiced.

"He might just have his own secrets." Ai defended.

"Ai, you have to understand that it's weird to be so vague." Meimei said. "I get he's doing the whole mysterious thing, and it's attractive, but there's something off about him."

"Come on." Ai said in annoyance. "It's not like we're any different. We hide, lie, and are vague all the time."

"You're all idols Ai." Miyako said.

"So?" Ai asked.

"It makes sense for you girls to hide, but not for a supposed 'mover'." Miyako did air quotes with her fingers.

"That was the weirdest part." Meimei said. "You'd think he'd say he worked for a moving company or at least name it, but he is a mover of antiques?"

"That is kind of suspicious." Nino commented.

"There should be no reason he should be vague about what country he's from or even what he does. Not unless he's hiding something." Miyako said.

"I'll admit, he's not very talkative." Ai said. "But we don't know his reasons, so we shouldn't assume anything. Maybe he doesn't want to talk about his whole life story to strangers."

For a moment, none of the girls said anything. They knew Ai was partially right, but at the same time they knew how odd Eren acted and how that could lead to something bad down the line.

"She's already hooked." Kyun sighed.

"Logic has no more room in her heart." Nino said sadly.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Ai asked, though didn't get upset.

"Ai, you're crushing on him." Miyako said.

"W-what?" Ai asked as she blushed. "N-no I'm not. I'm just trying to help him see a concert." She tried to look at anything but the other girls in the room.

"Ai, I was young and dumb too once." Miyako began. "I know what it's like to have a crush on a guy and ignore the signs that there's trouble. But you have to understand that he's just odd."

"Well, everyone is odd." Ai defended again.

"We also are concerned you'll make the same mistake." Meimei said, addressing the thing they all wanted to say.

For a moment, the room but cold as Ai looked down sadly. For several moments, no one said a word as Ai's shy and defiant demeanor changed to one of sadness.

Aqua paid attention the whole time as they ate. He could piece together that Meimei referenced Ai's ex, since it was the only

possible thing that her words could mean given the context. He had no doubt himself and Ruby were mistakes, but for this mistake to cause such uneasiness among the group implied there was more than just a simple pregnancy.

"There's something about Eren that just reminds me of him." Meimei began, intentionally staying vague since the children were present.

"How so?" Ai asked.

"Something about his eyes." Meimei said. "There's just something there. Something dark. He doesn't act like him, but I just have the same feeling when I look at Eren as I did with H-"

"Stop." Ai said. "Not now." She motioned to her children so they wouldn't notice.

"Sorry." Meimei said.

"The point we're making Ai, is that you were in this position before where you ignored signs and it ended up hurting you." Miyako said bluntly.

"It wasn't so bad-" Ai was cut off.

"Ai, he wasn't good to you." Meimei said. "He was charming and came off as very kind, but it wasn't real."

"I know." Ai said sadly.

"Especially since he left you with tw-"

"Drop it." Ai said desperately. "Please." She motioned again to her children, who she knew were smart enough to piece things together if they revealed too much.

Unfortunately, Aqua was much older than he appeared. He's heard of dozens of conversations like this from patients who would end up getting pregnant in abusive relationships. He was unsure how much

abuse there was with Ai and her ex though. He knew for a fact she never had any bruises during her concerts prior to her having twins, but makeup is amazing at hiding that. He could have also been mentally abusive to her as well.

"We're only looking out for you Ai." Meimei said. "We would be devastated if anything happened to you or the kids. I know it might be unfair to judge him without fully knowing him, but we can't help it when there's just something off about him."

"Thank you." Ai said sincerely. "But I won't just stop seeing him because of what you guys say. It's not fair."

Ai didn't have any romantic feelings for Eren, right? No, she convinced herself that she didn't. She just wanted to get to know him and do fun things with him. That's all. He's really interesting to her and she just wanted to get to know him. That's all.

So why do they make it sound like she's going to get proposed to or something? He's just a friend she's trying to make. Nothing more.

"Besides, I don't think Eren is similar." Ai said.

"How so?" Miyako asked.

"Eren doesn't lie." Ai said.

"But he keeps being vague about his life." Meimei said.

"Vague, yes." Ai agreed. "But never lied. He is someone who prefers his privacy and it's his right to do that. He never told a lie or pretended to be something else. Everything he said was genuine, even if he keeps things from us."

"Yes, but-" Meimei was cut off.

"When I talk to him, Eren seems sad if nothing else." She said. "Like something bad happened to him recently. He never hid behind a fake

smile like us, or said something that was untrue. He doesn't talk a lot about himself, but he's sincere in who he is."

"You learned all this in one interaction?" Miyako asked sceptically.

"Who knows, maybe I am being naive." Ai admitted with a small laugh. "He might be similar in some ways, but he doesn't wear a mask. He doesn't hide behind a fake personality. If he did, he'd probably be really bad at lying since his fake personality is so suspicious." Ai laughed a bit at that joke.

The girls decided to just go along with what Ai was saying. They couldn't deny that Ai wasn't wrong, but the red flags made it hard for them to just accept Eren.

"We'll try not to judge him." Meimei said reluctantly. "We'll keep an open mind about him and won't come to any rash conclusions."

"Say what you want." Miyako disagreed. "I've dated tall and mysterious boys like him when I was a teenager. It's exciting but so not worth the effort later."

"I-I never said I was going to date him." Ai sputtered.

"Seriously, get over your shyness." Meimei laughed. "Aside from me, you're the only one who has any experience with men." She laughed.

"Yea, not all of us get married at 18 with a 30-year-old guy." Ai shot back jokingly.

"I prefer men who are mature and refined." Meimei laughed.

"You girls do realize I'm here." Miyako said, who was the only other married woman in the group.

"You don't count Miyako-San, you're too old." Meimei laughed.

"Excuse me!?" Miyako said. She's in her mid-twenties, what do these girls mean old!?"

"Kidding." Meimei laughed, calming Miyako as she did.

"Besides." Nino said. "It's not like Eren is a criminal or anything." She laughed.

Night Prior

After Eren got the signed picture, he waited outside the concert for Sergie to pick him up. Sergie called his house phone last night and told him to prepare for another job. He let Sergie know that he would be around the Ai concert when he needed to get picked up and Sergie gave him a location.

The older man's vehicle pulled up right in front of Eren as he waited, which prompted Eren to get inside the passenger side of the vehicle. Sergie was in his usual outfit, clearly used to conceal his pistols.

"Never thought you'd like B-Komachi." Sergie laughed as Eren got in.

"That girl insisted I go see it since I never saw a concert before." Eren said.

"Ah, you got date?" Sergie asked.

"No." Eren shot down. "She wouldn't leave me alone about not ever seeing a concert before."

"You snuck gun in?" Sergie asked.

"Why would I need sneak it?" Eren asked.

"They check for weapons like knives. How did you sneak it in? You have gun, da?" Sergie asked.

"Yes." Eren said. "They never checked me."

"How?" Sergie asked.

"They just never did." Eren said. "Though I went in through the back."

"You got backstage pass?" Sergie asked.

"Yea, the girl got it. VIP I think she said." Eren confirmed.

"Girl must be loaded." Sergie said. "VIP cost pretty penny, you lucky."

"Why were you here?" Eren asked. "I'd imagine you to be more of a brothel guy instead of watching."

"What, because I'm criminal I can't enjoy pop music?" Sergie asked.

Eren just stared at him, not believing him at all.

"Truthfully, big fan of B-Komachi." Sergie laughed. "Especially lead, Ai. Really cute girl. Lots of talent. It is cool to see her perform."

"That surprises me." Eren said, still not fully buying it.

"I grew up in Soviet Union, entertainment was hard to come by." Sergie said. "Got manga when I was young, couldn't read it but loved pictures. My friends would sneak western comics from America, but I liked manga. Still have first ever one I got."

Eren considered asking what a manga was but kept silent since he was already suspicious enough.

"There's more to it Sergie." Eren said.

"Da, you not too stupid." Sergie laughed. "Did weapons trade deal at concert."

"Why do it in such a public place?" Eren asked, legitimately surprised.

"Not all criminal deals are done in abandoned warehouses." Sergie said. "Many are done at big sporting or entertainment events. Too many people to track and easy to escape if things go bad."

"So, you blend into the crowd?" Eren asked.

"Da." Sergie confirmed. "Many deals are done here, everything from weapons, drugs, slaves, money etc. B-Komachi concerts are a new favorite spot to do deals since they got so popular. Many criminals come here."

"So where are we going?" Eren asked.

"Abandoned warehouse." Sergie laughed. "Got one last deal, need gun in case things go bad."

"I'm surprised you chose me again." Eren said.

"You messed up one time, you're new so it's expected. You'll learn." Sergie said. "Plus, your skills are useful. Can't afford to not use them."

"I still never got paid." Eren said, referring to the fight night.

"I bet on you to lose." Sergie shot back.

"That wasn't my fault." Eren said.

"Da, I know." Sergie said. "Which is why I only took collateral out of payment and not put you in debt. We're even."

Eren nodded at that logic. He couldn't fault Sergie for that.

The drive through the city lasted about an hour. Eren kept thinking back to Ai and how sad she was when he said he didn't like the show. He didn't mean to upset her, but he really just wasn't

interested in the performance. He respected and even admired her passion, but he really didn't care for it.

He also thought about the supposed dangers that Meme, or whatever her name was, brought up. How she has to be careful about who she meets since apparently the fans can be very dangerous and violent towards them. Maybe that was why she would try to hide her identity. He supposed they were similar in that regard, both trying to hide from the public eye. Though while he was hiding due to his illegal status here, she did it to protect herself from overzealous fans.

Eren truthfully had no concept of that. Has there ever been a person in his world that was famous for the sake of being famous? The only famous people he knew of were royals, commanders, or men and women of wealth. Willy Tybur was the only thing he could think of that was similar to Ai, but even the Tybur's were politicians in a way.

Historia was similar in that she had to be protected from the public, but she was a queen. Not only did it make sense for her to have protection or to be targeted, but she had the entire government and military to protect her. Does Ai not have any kind of private security or army to defend her? Nobles would hire mercenaries and other bands of warriors to protect their homes and property, as well as their lives.

Was a famous person in this world not wealthy? Ai didn't seem very wealthy at all, yet she had all the downsides of being targeted like a queen or royal. Why would she do something like this if she didn't have any benefits to it? Eren didn't believe that she loved to make people smile, or at least didn't believe that was the full truth. There was something else that compelled her to be an idol. That much he could tell.

"We're here." Sergie said as the pulled up to an abandoned warehouse.

"Just doing an exchange?" Eren asked.

"Da." Sergie said. "Yakuza boss you met at fight club, he wanted to do deal but also see you again."

"Is that right." Eren said dismissively.

"Listen kid, you good fighter. But be respectful." Sergie said. "Yakuza boss is being nice because you're interesting, but don't make enemies. Only allies."

"Funny how you can say that while selling to everyone." Eren said.

"I make only allies." Sergie said. "Everyone knows I deal to all, but I'm too important to eliminate. Learn how to be like that, or live fighting for the rest of your life."

Eren tuned him out.

As they got out of the car, Eren helped Sergie move the boxes from the trunk into the warehouse. A few Yakuza guards stood near the entrance and let them pass, choosing not to disarm them.

Eren saw the Yakuza boss again, dressed more or less the same as the last time he met the man. His slightly larger gut hung over his belt, but he still cut an imposing figure since he was slightly taller than most of the other men. Though Eren still was taller.

"Good to see you again boy." He said, taking a puff of his cigarette.

"I can't say the same." Eren said honestly.

"That mouth of yours can get you killed." The boss laughed.

Sergie moved over to one of the man's lackies and spoke in Japanese, intent on doing the deal while Eren spoke with the boss.

"What do you want?" Eren asked.

"Come." He said. "Sit." He motioned to two chairs slightly away from everyone else.

Eren walked over and sat down, while the Yakuza boss sat on the otherside of him. Eren stayed hunched over, intent to jump at the slightest sign of danger. The Yakuza boss was calm though. Very calm.

"What's your name?" He asked.

"Sergie didn't tell you?" Eren asked.

"He told me your name, but it's rude not to introduce yourself." He said.

"Eren Yeager." Eren said. "You?"

"Yoshida." The boss said. "Though you can call me *Oyabun*."

"Oyuban?" Eren asked.

"It's hard to translate, but it basically means parental boss." He said. "Similar to other criminal syndicates, the Yakuza is like a family. My men are called *Kobun*, which loosely means children."

"I'm not one of your men." Eren said.

"No, you aren't." the Oyabun said. "And I have no intention of forcing you."

"Then why talk?" Eren asked.

"Because I would rather convince you." Oyabun said.

"Really?" Eren asked.

"I could try to force you." He said. "But all that would happen is you would die, along with a lot of my men. You're too skilled to be compelled. I could threaten loved ones, but that would have the same result. I'd lose your skills as well as a handful of my men."

"So how do you intend to make me?" Eren asked.

"Because I know how desperate you are." Oyabun said. "You can't find work elsewhere and need some kind of employment. That's the only thing I need to do. Instead of punishing you for not working with me, I'll instead reward you for it."

"Sergie already pays me." Eren countered.

"True, Sergie is good. But he lacks the resources that I have." Oyabun said.

"And what resources is that?" Eren asked.

"I'm the most powerful boss in the Kanto Region and have many government officials in my pocket." Oyabun said. "You don't have an identity, so I can get you one."

"Won't that compel me to get legitimate work and stop working for you?" Eren asked, knowing there was more to this than he was letting on.

"I can get you fake papers, but it would only be physical. I can't make a digital footprint for you." Oyabun said.

Eren had no idea what "Digital" meant, but he assumed that it meant that he still would struggle to find work.

"Why won't the papers be good enough?" Eren asked.

"Because I can't get into the governments systems. I can give you a fake number and fake identity, but if anyone runs a simple background check, you'll be found out to have fake documents." Oyabun said. "Most establishments run some kind of criminal background check digitally these days, especially for foreigners. All it takes is one background check to be discovered that your papers are fake."

"So why would I need them?" Eren asked.

"Because it'll help with basic things. As long as you ensure you don't have the number run through a system, you can get basic essentials such as a home that we don't provide and even basic work at low paying jobs. Though I doubt you'd want to struggle for a company that pays you less than you need to live just because they don't run checks."

Eren knew he was being played. He might not be forced to work for the man, but he has little to no choice regardless. Sergie may pay for him, but he'll never be able to give him an identity.

"So, the government of this country is corrupt enough to be ruled by criminals?" Eren asked.

"What do you mean?" Oyabun asked.

"You have them in your pocket." Eren said.

Oyabun laughed at that. He seemed amused at that question.

"The Yakuza is a very complicated group of organizations." He said.
"Though I prefer the name *Gokudo* ."

"Gokudo" Eren asked.

"It means the "Extreme Path" basically." He answered. "It comes from Buddhist traditions, though it's one of our most common names. Yakuza is more of a western name."

"So, what are you?" Eren asked.

"The Yakuza are thought to have originated from wandering swordman from the pre imperial days who formed bands of bandits or even do gooders who would protect people." He explained. "While we are criminals who don't hesitate to kill and extort, we also provide a service to Japan in humanitarian aid, disaster relief, and even protect the streets from unorganized crime. We have more of a relationship with the police instead of an actual rivalry."

"You work with them?" Eren asked.

"No, not exactly." He said. "The police typically leave us alone unless we really step out of line. We're more of a benefit to Japan than a hinderance. As long as we keep out of the public eye and avoid more immoral crimes, we're typically ignored. Many people in the restaurant business, entertainment agencies, and even small-time businesses either deal with the Yakuza willingly or are members themselves."

"That's odd to me." Eren said.

"Not many countries operate like this." The Oyabun said. "The police and government aren't anymore corrupt than other western first world nations, so we're not like eastern Europe."

"I think I understand." Eren said.

It was a good deal, Eren couldn't deny that. He'd get some form of identity, even if it did little to help him, as well as a stable income.

"I need time to think on this." Eren said.

"No problem." The Oyabun said.

He reached into his pocket, causing Eren to flinch for a moment, ready to react to being attacked. Instead, he pulled out a small box from his jacket and threw it to Eren.

"That's a smart phone." He said. "Your first month is paid for and I have your number saved to my phone. I'll be in touch."

A smart phone? Eren had no idea what that was. He opened the box and saw the same kind of device that other people used. It was one of those small moveable phones. here was a string or wire that was in the box too, like it was used to plug into a wall. Was it similar to his house phone? He guessed that he'd have to figure it out since it would be odd for him to ask how to use one since everyone had one.

"You should head back with Sergie now." The Oyabun said. "This is a small gift, don't worry about repaying me."

"You and Sergie both seem to just give gifts." Eren said.

"There's no point in employing you without the basics you'd need, plus with your skills, your future service would easily compensate the price of that phone in a job or two. You don't become the head of an entire Yakuza group by being dumb." He explained.

"I still haven't decided." Eren said.

"You don't need to Yeager-San." He retorted. "I know you'll be back for work. I don't need to manipulate you. Only dangle a piece of meat in front of your face like a dog. Whether you're aware of the trick or not is irrelevant. You're too desperate not to chase the food."

Once again, Eren knew he was right.

"We'll see." Eren said, trying not to show any form of submission to the man. Though they both knew Eren was having to posture in order to stay relevant. All his combat abilities mattered little when he's desperate for food and shelter.

After the meeting, Sergie finished up the business and they went back to his car. Sergie got in, buckled himself in, and started the engines to make their way back to Eren's apartment.

"How'd it go?" Sergie asked.

"I guess I'll be doing some jobs for him." Eren said solumly.

"It'll be good, Yakuza have more resources than I do. It's hard to really establish yourself as a foreigner. I have more power in Vladivostok than here." Eren assumed it was a city in another country since he never heard of it.

"I don't like the idea of staying as a criminal." Eren said.

"Neither did I after the war." Sergie said. "I spent years in mountains of Afghanistan only to be made logistics Officer when I came home. It's dead-end job that has little pay or authority. I got into criminal life to get better life. It worked; I am very wealthy now."

"Is that how you started gun running?" Eren asked.

"Da." Sergie said. "I had thousands of weapons and army vehicles at disposal with no oversight. Easy to write off a few tanks, trucks, or AKs. Until end of Soviet Union happened and entire army looked for scapegoats. Had to leave before I was court martialed for doing the exact same thing everyone else was doing."

"Do you regret it?" Eren asked.

"No." Sergie said honestly. "But I grew up in an environment of death, corruption, murder, and secrets. I may have been born after Stalin's Union, but Soviet Union was still a shit hole to live in. So, I never saw criminal life as different than regular life."

Though Eren didn't understand many of the words, he was able to understand the context.

"I think you are similar in that regard." Sergie said.

"Really?" Eren asked.

"You lived life surrounded by death from young age. You fought in war, did things you regret, and now don't know what to do after something terrible happened." Sergie deduced.

Eren wondered what he would say if he found out that the thing he recently did was global genocide.

"You able to see through me or something?" Eren asked.

"No." Sergie said. "Just remember how I was at that point in my life."

Eren stayed silent again, thinking about what Sergie said. In a way, Eren guessed that their histories were similar. Minus the giant man-eating monsters and global genocide of course. Eren wondered if warfare in this world was similar to his time in the Mid East as opposed to the unique way of warfare developed by paradise. Though in the last year he was in the scouts, there were talks of completely changing to a military structure similar to Marley.

Eren was dropped off at his home and got out without saying anything. Sergie didn't say anything back, choosing instead to leave the young man to his own thoughts.

Eren opened the door to his room and went over to his bed. It was midnight by now, at least based on what the hands on the clock showed. He still didn't fully grasp the number system of this world, but he was able to start understanding it.

Eren took his journal that he used to study the numbers and opened it up. The first few pages had entries of the past few days that Eren decided to write down. He knew he'd eventually have to learn this world's written languages, but he also didn't want to slowly lose his own written language as well. So, he chose to keep a journal so he could keep in practice with his own language.

Eren placed his loaded pistol on the small table near his bed and took his hoodie and boots off. Eren was tired and not really interested in doing much right now. He would figure out that smart phone thing tomorrow after he had some rest.

Then he would come to a decision. If he worked with the Yakuza boss he knew that he would likely be stuck into working with them with no easy way to leave. But his other option was to eventually lose work and starve. He really had no choice.

"Keep moving forward." Eren reminded himself. "No matter the consequences, keep moving forward."

He laid down on the bed and closed his eyes before quickly falling asleep.

And I'm back.

This was actually fun to write. I know the manga is a bit unsure right now of how the relationship between Ai and her ex were, but I am going with my own angle for it. Whether it ends up being true or not won't change anything.

This is also going to ramp up Erens criminal affiliations since he is desperate. Despite potentially getting papers, most businesses at least run a criminal background check so even with a fake passport, he still won't be able to do much. It'll only pass the initial look. Even if a cop runs the number, Eren is screwed.

So no matter what, he needs to get into the criminal world. Especially since that can add some interesting drama to his relationship with Ai.

Thanks again for all the reviews. I'm glad to pop back on after two and a half weeks and see all the messages and reviews.

You Can't Read?

Chapter 9: You Can't Read?

Eren opened the box that the Oyabun gave him. The box that carried the moveable phone that he's seen everyone else use in this world. He knew that in order to adapt to this world, he needed to start learning how exactly the technology works.

However, as hard as he tried, he can't get past the language barrier. He doesn't know the written language and as such is unable to learn about the world without help. Even if he were to find a library, it would be of no use since he can't even read a single book. He doubted he could even find a library since he would be unable to even read the building signs and locate one.

However, he also couldn't ask people for help as it put too much suspicion on him. The group that was with Ai got far too suspicious of him over his vague responses, that he could tell. He had no way of making a convincing backstory since he has no idea what this world is like. He only knows of two countries, this United States and what was once called the Soviet Union.

Even a backstory from there would be odd since he is illiterate and can't understand Russian. So Eren was at a complete dead end with no clear way of learning about the world.

The moveable phone was a simple black square. It looked like a much smaller version of the black mirror in the room, which he knew was some kind of moving picture device. He would occasionally see people tap the mirror on the small phone and it would light up. He wondered if there were hidden dials or buttons on it.

Eren tapped the phone a few times and nothing happened. He didn't see any hidden dials or buttons on the mirror that would either put in

the right frequency or even activate it. He felt around the edges and did find three distinct buttons.

There was one button on the right side and two buttons on the left side. He wondered if they were used to manipulate it. Eren pushed each button a few times and even a few of them together in a random fashion, still nothing.

He turned it around and saw no way to activate it. No other buttons or ways to interact with the device.

Maybe it wasn't a moveable phone. The boss said it was a smart phone, what ever that was. Maybe like his house phone, it needs to be connected to the wall.

Eren took out the wire and used the small box end to put into the wall. It fit neatly into the holes in the wall and would allow him to use it. He noticed a small hole on the bottom of the phone, which was the same shape as the other end of the wire. Eren put it in and hoped something would happen.

Suddenly, a red light appeared on the mirror. Eren was a bit surprised but by now was used to strange things in this world. The image on the mirror was a red box that had a small portion of it glowing red. Red normally means bad, so he wondered what was going on.

Eren waited for a bit and stared at the mirror. Eventually he noticed that the portion that was red slowly got bigger and bigger. After maybe half an hour, the red image turned green, and the portion filled up more. It reminded Eren of a canteen being filled with water.

Maybe if Eren waited, it would turn on when it's filled all the way. He had to take that gamble.

Eren waited for a while, maybe a few hours. He looked at his clock and the small hand passed by three numbers by this point. He knew

that it was around noon time by this point. Finally, the device reached its max fill.

Once again, nothing happened. Nothing that would indicate any changes in the device.

Eren decided to try the small booklet in the box, hoping that maybe that would be able to help him.

"Damn." He muttered to himself.

He noticed that there were multiple languages on the little book. He could tell because there were entire paragraphs with radically different symbols. He recognized three paragraphs that looked like Japanese, but with slight difference that he wondered if they were also different languages.

"All these languages and still nothing familiar." Eren said in annoyance.

There were pictures at least. A few of the pictures had arrows and words telling the reader what each piece was supposed to be. It was useless since Eren didn't know what those words were saying. There was another picture that showed the black mirror with boxes on it. He wondered if those were the buttons. A hand was over some of the pictures with arrows, implying that he had to slide his finger across them.

Eren picked up the phone and tried to mimic the picture. He placed his finger gently on the mirror and started sliding it. When nothing happened, Eren tried applying more and more pressure. Still nothing.

"Damn it all." Eren said in frustration. "How does this work?"

Eren stood up and removed the phone from the wire. He decided to get some fresh air, so he went outside in order to try and figure this out. He pocketed his pistol before going out however.

For at least another half hour, Eren tried everything he could think in order to make the small device work. He tried pushing the three buttons in different ways, swiping on the small mirror while pushing the buttons, and even hitting it with his knuckles. He couldn't figure anything out.

"Is your phone not working?" Eren heard to his right, over where Ai lived.

Sure enough, Ai was standing outside her door, picking up some of her mail, before she noticed Eren.

"Thought you went to a celebration." Eren commented.

"I did, Miyako-San dropped me off an hour ago." Ai smiled.

"Welcome back." Eren said politely.

"Thank you." Ai smiled again. "So is your phone broken?" She asked.

"It won't activate." Eren said.

"Activate?" Ai said. "That's a weird way of phrasing it." She giggled. "Let me see it."

Eren handed her the device. She pushed the top button on the left and the single right button together before holding it for a few moments. After holding it down, an image of a partially eaten fruit appeared.

"Seems to be working." Ai said.

Eren thought that was stupid. Normally dials and buttons were labeled so you know what they did. Did this world just not have any kind of actual need for labels?

"Ah, it must be new." Ai said.

"How can you tell?" Eren asked.

"Well, you need to set it up." She said, holding the mirror to Eren which displayed more unknown characters. "But it's in Japanese, did you get it here?" Ai asked.

"My boss gave it to me." Eren said.

"Oh, it's your work phone?" Ai asked.

"Yes." Eren said.

"Well, I'll set it up for you and change the setting to English when I get into it." She said.

Eren watched over her shoulder as symbols and pictures appeared in quick succession. A mini typewriter styled board appeared on the mirror and Ai typed away with speed and precision that Eren only saw from people used to typing on typewriters.

"Do you spell your name with a Y or a J?" Ai asked Eren.

"Huh?" Eren asked.

"Your last name, Yeager. Is it spelled with a Y or J?" She clarified.

Eren had no idea what those were. He assumed they were letters in this worlds alphabet so he decided to just make it up.

"The first one." Eren said.

"Got it, Y-E-A-G-E-R, is that correct?" She asked.

"Yes." Eren lied, not knowing how to spell his name in this worlds language.

"And we'll set a passcode later." Ai mumbled. "And we're in." She smiled, showing Eren the phone.

It looked like how it did in the book, where there were small boxes with different symbols all over the mirror.

"Now you just go into settings and switch to English... and there, ready for use." She handed him the mobile phone. She may have switched the language to English, but it did little to help Eren.

"Thanks." Eren said.

"Why don't you add me to your Line account." Ai said excitedly.

"Line?" Eren asked.

"Yea, it's a Japanese messaging app. It's like WhatsApp or Instagram." She said excitedly. "I'm not surprised you don't know, most foreigners don't when they first arrive. But nearly everyone in Japan has one."

Ai opened her own phone and showed him her mirror. She pushed a green box and it flashed for a moment before showing a new picture, this one with what looked like written Japanese words on either the left or right side of the mirror.

"We can text each other. It's easy to switch my keyboard to English." She smiled.

"I don't know." Eren said, not knowing what texting meant, but if it involved writing it would confirm to Ai that he's illiterate.

"It'll be fun, come on." She said. "I'll set that up for you too." She took Eren's phone before he could react.

She messed around with it for a bit before eventually he had the small green square on his mirror. She moved so quickly Eren was barely able to keep up.

"There, now what's your phone number?" She asked.

"I don't know." Eren said.

"Oh, it's new right? No problem, we can get it from the settings." She said.

Eventually, Eren had this Line App thing and she handed it back to him. He took the phone and saw what looked like a blank box on the mirror with a picture at the top that looked like some kind of animal, maybe a rabbit.

"And let's try it out." She tapped her own phone a few times.

Bing!

Eren almost jumped as the moveable phone vibrated, as if it was a metal sword that was just hit and made a noise he never heard before.

"Try typing back." She smiled.

On the mirror was what he assumed were English words, but he couldn't make them out. He had no idea what they were saying and had no clue how to respond. Even if he did understand what she said, he had no idea how to send letters through this moveable phone.

Eren looked down, unsure of what he should do. He knew that if he wanted to, he could just tell her to leave and say she was bothering him. It would hurt her, but he'd avoid being seen as suspicious. All he had to do was tell her to leave, then go back into his room. If he hurt her feelings, maybe she would leave him alone.

However, he didn't want to do that either. He remembered the sad look on her face when he said he didn't like the performance and didn't want to see that again. Especially after she was nice enough to drag him, against his will, to something she thought he'd enjoy.

"What's wrong?" Ai asked, worried when he didn't respond.

Eren took a deep breath before he made his decision.

"I can't read." He finally said.

"Well duh." Ai laughed, causing Eren to get worried.

Did she knew all this time?

"That's why I switched your setting to English." She laughed.

Oh, that's what she meant.

"I can't read English." Eren said.

There was a moment of silence between them.

"You can't read English?" Ai asked after a moment.

"No, I can't." Eren said.

Ai looked at Eren in complete confusion. Was he teasing her? He had to be teasing her. There's no way he wasn't teasing her.

"How can you be so good at English, but not know how to read it?" She asked.

Eren kept quiet, refusing to answer as he usually does.

Ai wasn't oblivious to the red flags Eren showed, she just conveniently chose to ignore them. However, she didn't know what to classify this. A native English speaker who can't read or write in English? That makes no sense whatsoever.

Eren also looked, sad. Like he was almost defeated. Like he was hiding a great secret that is now revealed to the world and is humiliated by it. Ai felt bad for him. She didn't know what circumstances led to him being here in Japan without any kind of education, but she knew that it couldn't have been his fault.

Eren didn't talk much about himself and spoke vaguely, but he never lied to her. At least she never caught him lying. Thinking back, he

never even lied about being illiterate.

"So how did you find yourself in Japan?" Ai asked.

"A friend of mine helped me." Eren said. "He helped me get this apartment and phone. He also employs me." For Eren, it wasn't an outright lie.

Every alarm bell in Ai's head told her to leave. There was something off about Eren. The mysteriousness of Eren is interesting, but she felt that it was starting to get into the dangerous territory. Who in the world from a first world nation can't read?

That's when a thought occurred to her. Maybe Eren wasn't from a first world country. She assumed he was maybe from Canada or the USA, but it was possible he wasn't from there. It's just as likely he could be from Eastern Europe or even some African Nations, where public education is not as good as the rest of the world. Or maybe English is only his second language, and he knows a different written language.

"Did you ever have a phone before?" Ai asked.

She wondered that since he seemed to not even know how to turn his phone on. At first she thought this was his first smart phone, which would make sense if he was from a Rural area, but now she wondered if he ever had a phone.

"No." Eren said.

"Well, let's teach you how to use it." She smiled, silencing the alarm bells in her head.

"Huh?" Eren asked.

"Not much we can do on you being illiterate, but we can at least get some of the basics." She smiled.

"I guess." Eren said, surprised she's not acting suspicious.

"One moment." Ai said as she opened her own door. " *Aqua-Chan, Ruby-Chan, mama is going to be next door for a bit! You two behave!* " She yelled in Japanese.

"What'd you say?" Eren asked.

"Just that they need to behave themselves for a bit." Ai said.

"Is it a good idea to leave kids on their own?" Eren asked.

"They're a lot more mature for their age. They'll be fine for a few minutes." She waived his concerns off. "Let's go into your apartment." She said, passing by Eren and into his room.

"Wait!" Eren said, not appreciating the small woman just barging into his room.

"Wow, this place is empty." Ai said, though her voice had a bit of sadness in it.

"I don't exactly have much." Eren said, still annoyed at Ai.

"You didn't even turn on your TV?" She asked.

"My what?" Eren cursed as he asked that question on response.

"That thing, you don't know what a TV is either?" She asked.

"No." Eren said honestly again.

Ai looked over to his sink, which currently had his hoodie in it, still soaking wet with some laundry detergent that he used to try and clean it. It was still wet but it looked and smelled clean, just needing to air dry now.

"You don't have a washing machine?" Ai asked, pointing at the soaking wet hoodie.

"No." Eren said again, now getting agitated.

"But I can see one right there." Ai said, pointing towards the partially opened closet.

Sure enough, whatever she referred to as a washing machine was there. What was a washing machine? A machine that washed clothes? Eren wondered what the box was but couldn't even figure out how to activate it either.

"So, you know nothing of a modern city?" Ai asked.

"What do you want from me!?" Eren raised his voice, getting annoyed at being judged by the small woman.

Ai turned towards him, a look of shock on her face from his raised voice. Eren suddenly felt bad about raising his voice, but he felt embarrassed at being treated like an illiterate idiot.

Everyone here treated him like a damn idiot. Everyone. Eren was smart, he knew that. He wasn't as smart as Armin, who was? But he doesn't like being treated like this by literally everyone.

"I think that's the first time I heard you have some emotion." Ai smiled at him, not at all affected by his raised voice.

"What?" Eren asked.

"It's just, you always seemed so sad and depressed that it's actually nice to hear you speak with some emotion, even if it's agitation." She giggled.

Eren cocked his head as he stared at the short woman. Did she really find this amusing? Did she find his annoyed attitude and anger appealing or something? She must be crazy.

"But I am being rude." Ai admitted. "I apologize." She said as she bowed to him, similar to how he saw Hizuru people bow in respect.

"Whatever." Eren turned his head at the display.

"I shouldn't make it sound like you're stupid or an idiot, that was my fault." Ai admitted. "I didn't mean to, but I can see you're struggling. So how about we make a deal."

"What deal?" Eren asked.

"Well, we can start by actually making your apartment more livable." Ai said, motioning around to the empty apartment. "For example, how much clothes do you have?" She asked.

Eren motioned to what he was currently wearing.

"That's it?" Ai asked.

"I do wash them at least once a day." Eren said.

"Still, you really don't have much." Ai said. "Well, that's no problem. We'll start there." She said in a cute voice while holding up two fingers again.

There's that cute act again, that cute act that annoyed Eren every time he saw it. He understood that professionally she had to do it, but while she was here alone, did she really have to continue acting that way?

"We'll go to the mall and get you good clothes, that way you can actually wear something different." Ai said happily. "We'll also get you stylish clothes, style and looks are my specialty after all."

"I suppose so." Eren deflected.

"Come on, I'll get my baseball cap, glasses, and my kids. We'll make a fun day out of it." Ai said in excitement. "We can also get delicious food and drinks too."

Before Eren could say anything, Ai grabbed him by the hand and practically dragged him outside towards her house so she could get ready.

Why was Eren not resisting? He was easily ten times stronger than she was. He could just rip his hand out of hers and literally push her out of his room, close the door, and forget she ever existed. But instead, he allowed himself to be dragged like a child by the small woman who barely came up to his shoulders.

What was wrong with him?

"And that should last." Ai smiled at Eren, who was currently carrying six bags full of clothes, one in each hand.

Eren just kept his mouth shut and did exactly what he was told. It almost reminded him of when he first joined the Survey Corp, and he was ordered around by Captain Levi. Was there something about Orientals that forced him to compel to their orders? Was Ai secretly this worlds version of an Ackerman?

She forced him to walk all the way to this eight-floor mall with moving stairs and different levels of stores that had food, clothes, and other basic essentials. Then she shoved clothes into his arms and almost pushed him into a changing room in order to try them on. She wasn't satisfied until she found what his size was and only then did she start picking different clothes for him to wear.

Even when she learned his size, she still wanted him to try them on over and over again.

"We have to make sure that it fits." Ai said when Eren complained.

"You already found my size, why do we have to continue to try them on?" Eren asked.

"Simple, it's not about fitting. It's about being well dressed and having form fitting clothes. Just because a pair of pants fit, doesn't mean that they are form fitting. We need to make sure you have a good style." She explained, though it still went over Eren's head.

Again, Eren at any time can just leave. He can overpower her and simply walk away back to his room and avoid all the pain and annoyance.

Yet for some reason, he couldn't. He could say that he needed to learn about the world, and she was offering him a way without being too suspicious. But the truth is, Eren actually found her interesting. He even appreciated the help, though he still was annoyed.

Eren really couldn't interact with Ai's children either, since neither of them spoke his language. Though the blonde girl seemed energetic and excited, offering her own wordless hand gestures that either approved or disapproved his outfits. The girl really took after her mother.

The boy on the other hand stayed quiet. Eren could see the boy was silently watching and analyzing Eren. Eren wasn't too surprised. The boy was young, but he could tell the boy was concerned about the stranger who was with his mother. Even Eren knew young children could be cautious around strangers, so he wasn't surprised. If anything, he preferred how the boy acted since it made more sense than the weird, cute ways that Ai and her daughter acted.

At least her daughter was still a child and it made sense. Ai was an adult woman.

After literal hours, Eren finally had enough clothes to satisfy the fashion crazed woman.

"Do you like Jjampong?" Ai asked Eren.

"Never heard of it." Eren said.

"It's actually Chinese." Ai said, making Eren remember the Chinese spies he helped on his first job with Sergei. "It's spicy seafood noodle soup, it's so delicious." Ai told him.

Eren shrugged, not all that interested in what they ate so he trusted the idol to make the decision.

" What about you kids, do you want Jjampong? " Ai switched to Japanese to the kids.

" Sure Ai. " Aqua said.

" Yea, that sounds awesome. We should teach him really good foods. " Ruby agreed.

" Exactly Ruby-Chan! " Ai said in excitement. *" Ruby-Chan says she wants to show you delicious foods too. "* Ai said.

"I didn't catch that." Eren said, realizing Ai was talking to him.

" Right, I keep forgetting to switch. " Ai laughed to herself. "I said, Ruby-Chan also wants to show you delicious foods." She smiled.

"Sure." Eren shrugged.

"Don't be like that, it'll be delicious. Go sit down and I'll order." Ai said in excitement.

Eren went with the kids to sit down at a booth in the restaurant while Ai went to go order food. He set the bags down on the inside of the booth while the kids got in on the opposite side of him.

The kids started talking to each other in Japanese, completely unable to communicate with Eren due to the language barrier. Eren briefly wondered what they were talking about. Perhaps it was about him and how they felt about him. He wouldn't be surprised.

Eren glanced towards the exit of the restaurant, making it seem like he was stretching his neck. There was a man walking by, wearing a hoodie with the hood up, obscuring his face. Eren noticed that man in the mall a few times, always taking glances at Ai. Eren wondered if he was following her. However, it was also possible he was another

mall guest who was simply happened to pass by and glanced at Ai. Even with the disguise, Eren could recognize she was attractive.

However, he also felt like there was a danger there. He kept his gaze at the entrance for a few more moments, but the hooded man didn't come back to the entrance. Eren would keep an eye out in case he was a threat. Meme mentioned that Idols were victims of stalking, so he wondered if the man knew Ai was here.

" *Here we go!* " Ai said in excitement. " *I got the small bowls for my special little babies.* " she said sweetly.

" *Mama, I'm not a baby.* " Ruby groaned.

" *Don't grow up on me too Ruby-Chan.* " Ai almost cried. " *I need at least one of you to keep acting like my precious baby.* " She complained. " *And one for you Eren.* "

Ai handed him a bowl of seafood noodles, which was still very hot.

"You're talking in Japanese to me again." Eren said.

" *Oh, whoops.* " Ai said, bonking herself on the head again with her tongue out. "It's really hard to remember which language I'm speaking." She giggled.

Eren looked at what he had to eat with. A weird spoon made out of a material that felt almost like a light kind of glass, and a pair of wooden sticks.

"Guess you don't know how to use chopsticks." Ai said, picking up her own sticks in a way that looked like she had years of experience using them. To be fair, she did.

"That would be correct." Eren said.

Ai took a moment to show him the proper hand position to eat chopsticks. Eren was completely unable to do it. His hand started to cramp from being put in such an awkward position that he eventually

just resorted to grabbing each stick with both hands and trying to pinch the noodles. A few times the noodles would slip out, making a mess around the bowl.

Ai giggled in a very cute and unnatural way.

"Seriously, you have to stop doing that." Eren complained again.

"My idol act?" Ai said.

"Yes." Eren confirmed. "Honestly, I prefer the way you acted on the way to the concert. You just acted like you; it was endearing." Eren said without thinking.

Ai blushed at that. He found her regular personality to be cuter than her idol act? She honestly never met anyone who thought that about her. Everyone always preferred her idol act over the way she normally acts.

"To be honest, it's hard to be myself." Ai said sadly.

"How so?" Eren asked as he sipped some noodles. "Damn, hot!" He said.

"Careful, you need to give it time to cool down." Ai said. "Try this."

Ai took her glass of iced water and poured some of the water and ice into his soup. The ice melted quick but would make the temperature a bit more bearable.

"Thanks." Eren said. "But what did you mean?" Eren asked, getting back on topic.

"Since I was twelve, I've always had to act this way." Ai said.

"Interviews, performances, acting jobs. Everything."

"So, you're used to it?" Eren asked.

"I guess so." She said, though still seemed confused. "It's all a lie. Everything I do on the media is a well-crafted lie that's meant to make people love me and make the studio money."

"This isn't the studio though." Eren said, taking another bite out of his noodles.

"I know." Ai said. "But I've lived the lie for so long, I really don't know how to just act like me." She confessed. "I guess I try to act like me, but I don't know where the lies begin and end anymore."

Eren stopped eating for a moment as he looked at her. He honestly never considered that. He never considered that she would have so much pressure from her profession that it would make her start to question herself.

Though for Eren, it was like looking in a mirror.

"I understand what you mean." Eren said as he put his spoon down.

"You do?" Ai asked.

"Yea, I do." He said as he stared down into his bowl.

How long had Eren actually been honest about the way he felt. How long had he kept silent about the weight of his sins that he had yet to commit. How long had he been with his friends, knowing full well who was going to die and who was going to live?

"You don't have to talk about it if you don't want to." Ai said, reaching out and grabbing his hand.

Talk about it? Eren wondered if he should. How could she believe? Believe the things he did, the people he hurt, and the innocents he trampled. He knew, ever since he kissed Historia's hand, what would happen. He kept silent the whole time. He let that fear, that stress, and that pain build up for four years, never releasing it.

"For the past four years, I've been acting different than how I used to." Eren admitted, feeling the fear and stress slowly leave his shoulders.

"How so?" Ai asked.

"Something... happened." Eren said as he looked down. "Something that I couldn't tell anyone. Four years ago, I had to act different around the people I cared about."

"How?" Ai said.

"I... said things I didn't mean to people I cared about." He admitted.

"Believe me when I say this Mikasa, ever since I was a kid, I've hated you." Eren's heart broke as Mikasa was finally pushed to the edge, tears leaking from her eyes.

"I hurt people I considered close to me."

"Hey Armin, the two of us have never fought before, have we?" Eren said as Armin moved to punch him. "Do you want to know why that is?" Eren said as he moved to the side and countered with his own punch. "It's because, it would never be a fair fight." Eren said as he beat Armin until he was unable to move.

"I had to lie, to push those I cared about away." Eren said. "I did it to protect them. To make sure they lived long and happy lives."

Ai could see the pain on Eren's face. It was a pain she never saw before. So much regret and pain were behind those eyes. So much sadness and hurt. For four years he had to act in a way that hurt his friends in order to make sure they were happy? She didn't understand.

But, when she looked at Eren, she could tell he was honest. There were no lies in those eyes of his. Just regret and pain. It broke Ai's heart to see him in so much pain, and she didn't know why.

"What were you like before?" Ai asked, unsure of what to say.

"Probably worse." Eren smiled a bit, his first genuine smile that Ai saw from him.

"Worse?" Ai asked.

"I was headstrong and stupid." Eren admitted. "I picked a fight with anyone who wronged me, often times got myself in trouble. To the point where my mother would scold me or Mikasa would have to get me out of trouble."

Ai noticed he looked back fondly on those memories, as if they were good times that were not long since passed.

"So, you were a troublemaker?" Ai giggled, hoping to make some lighthearted humor to cheer Eren up.

"Yea, you could say that." Eren smiled a bit at that. "Mr. Hannes would always have to drag me back home, covered in bruises when I would lose to a group of bullies."

"You would lose?" Ai asked.

"I was an idiot then, always charging into fights I knew I'd lose." Eren said with a smile. "They'd always gang up on me. Mikasa was always the better fighter, and Armin was a pacifist. So, I'd rush on without them all the time and find myself alone."

"And your mother would have to treat your bruises." Ai laughed, imagining a kid Eren getting scolded by a woman who looked similar to him.

"Yea, she would always get upset with me." He laughed.

"I bet she still worries about you." Ai laughed, though she stopped when Eren got sad again.

"She died." Eren said.

"Oh, I'm sorry." Ai said, not intending to bring back bad memories. "

"It's alright." Eren waived off.

"Did it happen recently?" Ai asked, wanting to understand if maybe that's what caused his current sadness but also trying hard not to upset him.

"No." Eren said. "She was killed when I was ten." Eren admitted.

Ai's heart stopped for a moment. Killed, as in not died of natural causes. His mother was killed, and based on how sad Eren was, she guessed that someone did it. Someone took his mother away from him.

"I..." Ai struggled to find the words. "I can't imagine." Ai said. "I'm sure she loved you very much."

Ai didn't know what to say. She never had to console someone before. She felt like it was such a stupid thing to say but she had no idea what to say. how do you try to say something to make someone feel better about something like this?

"Her last words..." Eren struggled to say. "Was that she loved me, and for me to stay alive." He looked down. "I don't regret that she died, only that I was always such a brat. That I never said that I loved her."

Ai's heart seized as he said those words. Eren never said he loved her? How was that possible? How could he never say that after ten years of having what sounded like a good mother.

But then... Aqua never said he loved her either. Now that she thought about it, her own son never once said he loved her. Could Ai blame him? Ai never once said she loved him, or Ruby. Ai's heart broke as she imagined something happening to her children, and the thought that they would never hear the words "I love you" from their mama.

It was enough to make her sick, but she was too much of a coward to say it. She was so scared that it would be a lie, just like every single time she told her fans she loved them.

What a horrible woman she was.

"My own mother was abusive." Ai said honestly, trying to derail her own thoughts while also empathizing with Eren.

"She was?" Eren asked.

"I never knew my father, but my mother was a horrible woman." Ai said. "It took me a long time to get over my false affections for her, but when I did, I realized that she was abusive and a monster. But Miyako-San and the President always treated me like I was their daughter. I guess in some way, I have a family in them." Ai said.

"My own father was a doctor." Eren said. "He died around the same time, but he was a good man." Eren smiled.

"He sounds like it." Ai said.

"I guess I found a family too." Eren smiled.

"Really, like who?" Ai asked, hoping that the conversation would be better.

"There was Jean, he was like an annoying older brother that I always fought." He laughed. "One time we got into a fight and repeatedly punched each other in the stomach until Captain Levi broke us up." He laughed at the memory.

Ai laughed too, but was confused that Eren was with a Captain. What kind of Captain was that? A police captain? Or maybe a captain of a cruise ship or something. It would explain how Eren got to Japan if he new a ship Captain.

Eren went into explaining all the different people he knew. A girl who they called "potato girl", a innocent and kind girl who ended up

finding herself, a crazed scientist that would do the weirdest experiments.

It seemed like a strange and dysfunctional family. But she was glad he at least found some happiness after he lost his parents.

"Where are they now." Ai asked through her giggles.

Eren looked down, sad again. Ai was worried that she brought up a bad memory.

"I... won't be able to see them again." Eren said sadly.

Ai didn't try to ask him to clarify. She didn't know if they died or if they were just out of his reach, but Ai guessed that whatever event weighed on his heart now was caused by whatever happened to his friends.

"Maybe we can help you find a new family." Ai smiled.

"You?" Eren asked, his sadness momentarily gone.

"Me, the other girls, even the President and Miyako-San." Ai said.

"I think they don't like me." Eren guessed correctly.

"Well, we'll make them like you." Ai said.

"How do you intend to do that?" Eren asked.

"Let's make a deal." Ai said.

"Ok?" Eren said.

"I'll do my best to relearn who the real me was, if you promise to do the same." She smiled.

"You do realize the real me was an idiot who picked fights all the time." Eren said with a smile.

"And the real Hoshino Ai was a dumb girl who was sad and lonely all the time." Ai joked. "We'll balance each other out. Won't be all that different now, since you're all depressed and serious and I'm cute and adorable." She flashed a peace sign at him.

"I think you're still dumb." Eren said, turning away from Ai.

"Probably." She giggled. "But we can only try." She said.

"This is stupid." Eren said.

"Yup, but maybe everyone would like you better if you were a little more energetic." Ai said.

"I make no promises." Eren relented.

"Good, we'll try it then." Ai said.

"I didn't agree." Eren tried to say.

"I don't care." Ai dismissed him. "You're going to do what I say regardless."

Seriously, she has to be part Ackerman.

After finishing their food, Eren and Ai got up and went to leave with all the bags he had.

As Eren left the restaurant and went into the main part of the mall, he quickly glanced over his left shoulder. Sure enough, the guy who was looking at Ai was still there, sitting on a bench and pretending not to glance over to Ai. Eren now figured whoever he was, he was tailing Ai. He decided to watch his back as they walked. If need be, he still had his pistol on him, so he'd be able to protect Ai if the man tried anything.

Then again, he didn't want Ai to know he had a gun, so he could just break the mans leg with a well placed kick. He needed to be careful around him and ensure he didn't follow them back to Ai's home.

Luckily, he was able to continue listening as Ai talked, each of her hands occupied by her children's hands as she walked. He mostly just listened as she talked, occasionally responding when she said something. But he kept all his senses directed at the man who followed them. Ready to do what he needed in order to defend the young mother and her children.

Thanks again for all the reviews.

This chapter had a lot of talking. I try to ensure I remember what makes sense for Eren to know and not know in terms of social customs and technology. Hope it comes off as realistic.

Thanks again for the feedback.

Aqua can't talk with Ai

Chapter 10: Aqua can't talk with Ai

Aqua went inside the apartment as Ai said goodbye to Eren outside. Ruby was quick to run inside and turn on the TV in order to start watching a show she was excited for, but Aqua stayed near the door to try and overhear them as they parted.

It was a simple goodbye, nothing special. Eren said thanks and waved goodbye to Ai as she did the same. Ai expressed how much fun it was, but Eren maintained his general stoic attitude by shrugging lightly and nodding in agreement. He wondered how much Ai was starting to like the stoic attitude that he gave off.

However, unknown to both adults, Aqua of course knew English since he studied it in his previous life and was fairly good at it. He of course had an accent, but he would wager that his English was better than Ai's. So even though both Eren and Ai believed that their conversation was between only them, Aqua was able to understand every word.

And to be honest, he felt conflicted. Aqua felt both sorrow for Ai and yet suspicion for Eren.

He never knew Ai had such a hard life. He always wondered why she would never say that she loved them. He wasn't stupid, he knew Ai never did, not even once. She never said she loved either of her children, which was always odd to him. Aqua was an adult before he was reborn, so he understood that although Ai never said the words, her actions proved her love for her children every single day. He never needed to hear her say she loved him for him to know that she did.

And to be honest, a part of him was almost glad since it would be strange to have a girl half his age constantly saying she loved him as a mother would.

Yet now, Aqua wondered how much of that was due to Ai's own insecurities. She was an expert at lying, one of the best in fact. He saw how she researched how to improve her act since he was born into this life. He watched how she managed to learn how to fake that beautiful and genuine smile after his and his sisters accidental Otaku moment. He saw her study other idols and take notes on how to best improve her idol performance.

She was a master at it, so much so that he never considered that maybe she had some insecurities due to her own past. She talked about how she had an abusive mother growing up and add that to the fact that he also assumed her ex was abusive, would mean that the most important people in Ai's life treated her poorly.

Ai was rarely shown any love or affection in her life. So much so, he wondered if she was scared of even being a mother. He remembered how excited she was when he treated her during her pregnancy. How she wanted so badly to be a mother and to carry her twins to term, even though she knew how much of a risk it would be to not only her career, but her safety as well.

Aqua felt bad about how he used to think of her after hearing that. He felt like he was a fool for thinking of her in the same way all her other fans did. Ai was a human being, like anyone else. She had her struggles and was far from perfect. Even now, as Hoshino Aqua, it was actually harder to see the cracks in her personality. Just as would be expected of a mother, she did everything she could to hide her troubles from her children and create this strong yet loving front for them.

Aqua could say he gained more respect for the idol, for how she was able to keep a positive attitude and raise children the way she did despite her terrible upbringing.

As Ai walked through the door, a wonderful smile plastered onto her face, Aqua couldn't help but be amazed by her. Truth be told, Goro never had a mother or any family really. He was always more or less alone and dedicated to his work. So, he never knew a world where the people he thought he loved hurt and abused him in the same way Ai was.

Which is why, he wanted to do something special for her. Something to show her that she wasn't alone and had people who genuinely cared for her. Even though he struggled to be her son, he would at least try to show her something.

Ai's face went from smiling to surprise as Aqua walked over and hugged her leg. Her hat and glasses were still on and her jeans covered legs still had a bit of a chill to them from the late fall cold.

"Aqua-Chan, are you ok?" Ai asked, unsure of what was wrong.

Ai was very surprised. Aqua never really hugged her at all. He was always such a serious boy that it was difficult to get any kind of affection out of him. She didn't think there was a single time in his short life that he ever initiated a hug. So she was confused.

"I'm fine Ai." He said, his voice calm and even.

Even though he showed a bit of affection, he still would not call her mama.

Ai kneeled down when he let go and gave him a confused look. She could tell that something was on Aqua's mind but was unable to fully understand what.

"What's wrong?" She asked, though his face remained neutral and unchanged.

"Nothing, just felt like hugging you." He shrugged.

Ai giggled a bit at his antics, interpreting it as his need to want attention yet too proud to admit that he wanted some. But she still wondered where this behavior came from.

The only thing that was different was Eren, which made her even more confused. Was Aqua afraid of something? Was he scared of Eren? She hoped not. Eren was very nice to them and she hoped that he could get along with Eren as she did. Maybe he was scared because Eren was so much bigger and acted in a very serious manner. Aqua never was around someone like that. The only male figure that he knew was the President, who while serious at work, still was playful and kind.

"I can tell you're lying." Ai giggled as she poked his nose, causing him to scrunch up slightly out of annoyance. She giggled a bit more at that reaction.

"Did you have fun with Eren?" aqua asked her.

For Ai, it confirmed that Eren was the spark that caused this little moment from her son.

"Of course, we got him some fashionable clothes and delicious foods. So, I had a lot of fun." She smiled.

That's what Aqua was worried about. He didn't think much on Eren at first, but now he was worried. The things that Eren said just weren't normal. He lived four years hiding something, hurt his friends and family, and did those things so that they could live. He knew there was much more to the story, but all Aqua could think about were alarm bells in his head screaming danger.

Why would hurting people keep them alive? Ai may look past it out of her own crush of him, but Aqua was essentially 34 years old by now. He was a lot less willing to give the man a chance if he was a threat to Ai.

"Are you afraid of Eren?" Ai asked, worried that her son was afraid of him.

"No." Aqua said.

Afraid? No. Concerned? Yes.

"Tell me what's wrong Aqua." Ai said in a loving and motherly voice. "I know you can't talk with him since you don't share a language. But he's a good man. There's nothing to be afraid of."

"I don't trust him." Aqua said honestly.

Ai's heart stopped for a moment, worried about why her son was so worried.

"Why not?" Ai asked.

Because the things he said sound so completely suspicious and the only reason you are tolerating it is because of a dumb crush? A habit that apparently got you into an abusive relationship with his apparent father in this life.

Yea... he can't say that.

"Because of what Miyako-San and the other girls said this morning." He lied, at least using that as an excuse to hopefully convince his mother to take this more seriously.

Ai looked down when he said that. She was worried that he was learning about Eren from what others said instead of learning about the man himself. Though, how could she blame him? He can't even hold a conversation with Eren.

"I know they have their concerns." Ai said. "But it's not fair for us to base our opinions on other people just because of what others say. It's not fair to judge people without first learning about them." She lectured.

He knows that.

"But they say he's vague about things." Ai tried arguing, unable to fully voice his thoughts due to his own limitations as a four-year-old.

"Us adults, sometimes there are things about our past that we don't like talking about." Aqua got annoyed when she said that. He's twice her age and doesn't want to get lectured. "So, it's not fair to assume someone is bad because they don't want to share things about themselves."

"Are there things you hide?" Aqua asked, hoping to lead a conversation towards her own past and maybe get her to share about her ex. Maybe if he can learn more, he can draw parallels between Eren and her ex so that she can at least see some of the dangers.

Ai however, shut down a bit. Unsure of how to answer that. Of course, there were things in her past she would rather bury and never think about again. Her abusive mother, her ex, and even her life before Aqua and Ruby were born. She remembered how scared and lonely she felt before and never wanted to imagine that life again.

"Nope!" Ai lied, showing her idol like smile to her son and putting her act into full force. "Mama has nothing to hide in her past. She's perfect."

Aqua knew it was a lie. And unfortunately, Ai would never be honest with him. Aqua was her son, and mothers are supposed to protect their children from bad things, not make them worry. As long as Aqua was her son, she would never tell him her fears, insecurities, or anything. It without a doubt made her a good mother, but it made Aqua's job harder.

"Why do you trust Eren?" He asked.

Ai thought for a moment but was quick with her response.

"Because he's kind and needs help." Ai said. "Sometimes, bad people can put up a front that hides who they are. They pretend to be someone you can trust and when they have your trust, they show who they really are." Aqua couldn't help but wonder if this was from experience.

"Ok?" He said in an unsure tone.

"However, Eren is honest with who he is. If he was trying to manipulate or hurt us, he'd pretend to be someone kind and charming. Instead, he is honest. Yes, he's sad and keeps to himself. He even will try and push people away. But even when I go up to him and drag him away, Eren remains kind and nice. He doesn't do anything to try and get something from me. He doesn't manipulate me or try to take advantage. If anything, he tries to run away from me." She giggled.

Damn it, one thing making her crush on him is the fact that he rejects her. It's a classic psychological trick. People want what they can't have, and Eren is playing hard to get.

Though, Aqua doesn't think Eren is doing it intentionally. Aqua does believe that Eren just wants his privacy and truly is rejecting Ai. Unfortunately, it has the effect of making Ai want him more.

"Come here." Ai said as she hugged her son who she kneeled down next to him.

With her rear resting on her feet, Ai was low enough that she was almost at Aqua's height. Her head rested on his shoulder as his rested on hers. Unlike before, her son didn't return the embrace.

"I know you're worried Aqua-Chan." Ai said lovingly. "But Eren is a good person. I can tell. He's lost and confused right now, and I can tell he needs help." And there's the nightingale effect at play. "But don't worry. No matter what, nothing will ever happen to me."

"I didn't say that." Aqua said, knowing that Ai was probably assuming he had childlike fears of her leaving her children for a new boyfriend. That wasn't true.

"It's ok Aqua-Chan." She said lovingly. "No matter what happens, nothing will split this family apart. I promise that." She smiled.

Aqua would get nowhere. He couldn't have a serious conversation with Ai. She kept assuming he had childish fears and tried to console him based on that. No matter what he tried to tell her, she would simply treat him like a child and hide any of her own fears from him.

"Thanks Ai." Aqua said, deciding to just drop the subject.

Although he couldn't do much, Aqua swore that he would do the exact same thing that Goro swore four years ago. He would protect Hoshino Ai, no matter what. Even if now, he was largely unable to do so.

"Can you let me go now." He said as she was still hugging him.

"Nope!" She said happily. "I want another hug from you!" She exclaimed.

And he was stuck.

"Wait!" He heard Ruby from down the small entryway. "Why does he get a hug and not me!?" She yelled; her voice full of betrayal.

"Well, come on and join us Ruby-Chan!" Ai said as her daughter sprinted over to her.

"But I want to hug mama alone!" She yelled, still angry at Aqua getting all the attention.

This just got worse.

Few Minutes Prior

Eren walked away as Ai went into her apartment and closed the door. Eren, instead of going back into his home, decided to wait outside of the apartment. He leaned next to the door and pretended to rest, leaving the bags of clothes at his feet as he did so.

Eren confirmed that they were being followed. Even now, in the corner of his eye, he could see the man with his face obscured by his hood maintain his distance across the street. He hid himself near an alley, partially hidden with only his face peeking through. Eren ensured not to face him directly so that he would not suspect that Eren knew he was following them.

Eren didn't know why this man followed Ai and could tell it was probably the same man with the flowers from yesterday. He knew Ai was here and wouldn't make direct contact with her while Eren was there. Eren was unsure of what he should do.

Should he confront the man? After all, he was not exactly showing the best intentions by following Ai. However, if he did that, it would make a scene and threaten to get the local authorities involved which could compromise him. However, Eren feared that if he did nothing, Ai would be in danger.

Eren thought why he cared if Ai was in danger. He rationalized to himself that if something happened to her, then the authorities would get involved and threaten him. Eren was damned if he did nothing and damned if he did anything.

Eren didn't want to leave Ai alone, however he also knew he couldn't stay there forever since he still had to work. Especially if the Yakuza boss sent him on a job.

Suddenly, Eren felt a vibration come from his pocket, right where his moveable phone was. He took it out of his pocket and mimicked the motion Ai showed him on how to answer it once it was moving. The symbols displayed were numbers on the mirror or "screen" as she called it. It meant it was an unknown number.

"Speak." Eren said into the phone, keeping his voice low so no one hears the conversation.

"I have a job for you." He heard the Yakuza boss from last night talk. "It's a simple job to test you, nothing intense."

"Just say it." Eren said impatiently.

"There's a man who owns a restaurant that owes us money. He's been late on payments a few times. I want you to send him a message that he needs to pay soon." The boss said.

So, he wanted Eren to be a debt collector. It seemed simple enough, a lot less than what he was expecting.

"Why send me?" Eren asked.

"You don't ask those questions." The boss said.

"I'm not a pawn." Eren said aggressively.

"No, but you are desperate." Eren felt anger rising up as he spoke to him like a piece of trash. He began to debate how much he needed the man's resources.

"Where?" Eren asked.

"I'll send a link over text. Simply push it when you see it and it'll open a map for you. Follow the map and you'll find him. I'll also include a picture." He said.

"You just want me to deliver a message?" Eren asked.

"I want you to break a bone." The boss said. "He's been late on multiple payments, and I already gave him a chance. I want the message to be clear."

"That's all?" Eren asked.

"Yes." The boss said. "It's simple and easy, well within your abilities. You have till tomorrow to do it. Don't fail me."

With that, the phone line was cut, and he no longer could reach the boss. The job bothered Eren since he hated the idea of being an enforcer to a debt, especially if it involved hurting people. Especially with how casually the boss treated Eren. He wondered if the fake documents and money was worth it. Since apparently the documents only go so far in proving his identity due to this "Digital" thing that Eren still had no clue of, why work with him?

He could easily continue working with Sergie since Sergie at the very least showed some morals. Why'll he was a criminal, he didn't do anything that involved hurting innocent people. At least not that Eren saw.

After two beeps from the phone, Eren tapped the screen, and it showed a picture of his target as well as another line with a bunch of words and numbers. Eren tapped it and it opened a new screen which showed an overview of the local area as well as a route from where he was to where his target was.

Eren was amazed at the technology. By swiping the screen, he could completely control the map and as he turned, so too did the arrow that represented him. It was amazing. The ability to show your position on a map in real time while also having it accessible to a device the size of your hand was so convenient. This technology was truly amazing. This little device could send letters, voice communication, show maps, and even moving picture shows. It was truly amazing.

He wondered how many scouts would still be alive if they had access to this technology. How spoiled this world was, never having to deal with the threat of the Titans.

However, Eren also didn't want to leave Ai. He knew that he had to make a decision on the stalker soon. He would either need to confront him, which risked bringing the authorities down on him, or

he needed to stay and protect Ai. Regardless of if he took initiative or remained reactive, either option could involve him getting questioned and potentially discovered.

He wondered if he should warn Ai, however that also had the possibility of being caught by the authorities. She would contact them, and they may still question him in order to get information to protect her. Anything that could involve the authorities knowing where he lived could run the risk of them investigating him and he could face an execution.

If this place was anything like Paradis or Marley, illegally entering into the country would be grounds for execution. Japan may be similar to that. Despite how much pain Eren was in from his previous sins, he didn't want to die. He refused to die. He would push forward no matter what and remain free. To hell with anyone who tries to steal his life and freedom away.

He felt angry with himself because all of this is because of Ai. He had to get involved. All he had to do was continue to refuse her and he wouldn't know about this issue. Why even care now. He could just let the stalker do as he pleases and stand by in order to avoid any attention. It was the smartest move.

After all, how many people, innocent people, did Eren directly kill in his assault on Liberio and the Rumbling? Is standing by and letting someone suffer really so much worse than that?

But that option was not good either. He doesn't know why, but the thought of something happening to Ai didn't sit well with him. It felt like if one of his friends were in danger. Eren couldn't explain it, but he felt as if protecting Ai was worth the risk to him being discovered. He thought of her being attacked and his gut told him that it was a completely unacceptable outcome.

What was wrong with him? She's a stranger. No one. Why does he care?

Why did he save Ramzi when he knew he was going to die anyway? Why did he do anything when he knew what would happen. Why did he care about the people he killed in Liberio if he knew that everyone beyond the walls would suffer anyway?

Why did he care about some random guy who he needed to break a bone for a debt.

Eren turned around and walked back into his apartment, only pushing the bags in so they were just inside the apartment. He rushed over to the bed and sat down, unable to properly think. His breathing got uneasy and he started to feel slightly light headed.

What is wrong with him? Why should he care about these people? They're not people he knows. They're not his close friends. They're strangers. They're people he shouldn't care about. Just random people who mean nothing to him.

So why was he in so much pain thinking about something happening to Ai? It made no sense.

"Damn her." Eren said to no one in particular. "Everything would be easy if she didn't talk to me." He whispered.

Eren laid back on the bed and rested his eyes, intending not to think about the young mother, or the man he was going to confront tomorrow.

Any thoughts on his hypocritical morals would wait until tomorrow after he rested.

Ai was dressed in a simple V neck white shirt and a pair of baggy pajama pants as she didn't plan to do anything else for the remainder of the day. Her hair was still a bit damp from her bath but no longer needed a towel to dry it. She was glad to smell fresh and clean after the long day of being with Eren.

Eren seemed so lost and confused the whole time. He had no idea how anything worked or even how to use basic things like a cell phone. He also had absolutely no sense of style either. She was glad she was with him to get clothes since Eren would be a lost cause at buying clothes. She was a master of fashion after all and knew all of the trendiest styles.

She also enjoyed how he opened up a bit more. His life was sad, but at least he was beginning to show a bit of emotion to her. It felt kind of nice, like she was the only one who could see that vulnerable side of Eren. Though she recognized that it was a dumb thought, since she didn't know how he interacted with the other people in his life.

Still, Ai was happy about how the day went. Eren did seem paranoid a couple of times, like he was constantly looking over his shoulder, but to be fair so did she. She was always worried that someone would recognize her and stalk her. But Hoshino Ai was a master at sneaking. No one could follow her without her noticing.

At least, that's what Ruby would always say. Her daughter always had such an overactive imagination.

"And done." Ai said as she finished stirring the pot of food that she was currently cooking.

"It's done?" Aqua asked from the main room and stood up, intending to get some food.

"Yes, finally!" Ruby said in excitement.

Today she decided to go with an American dish. Hamburger with miso soup and vegetables. She heard from the President once that Hamburgers were from Germany, but most people in Japan consider it an American dish. Not that she cared much since it was filling and nutritious with her recipe. They ate a little later than normal since they had a later lunch with Eren.

She moved the plates over to their small dining table, where her children were already sitting and excited to eat. Aqua still had his serious face while Ruby was bouncing with excitement at having her mama's cooking. It always made Ai happy to see the warm smiles on their faces as they were excited to eat.

"Make sure you two eat up." Ai said lovingly.

Ai kneeled down to put the food where it needed to go before getting on her knees in order to eat. She sat down with her feet to the side of her butt so that her butt touched the ground, which was a bit more comfortable for her to sit. Typically, she only sat on her feet when she was in social events or when someone was visiting. When she was alone, she preferred to just sit in a more comfortable way.

"Hey mama." Ruby said as she ate.

"What is it Ruby-Chan?" Ai asked as she picked the burger up and took a small bite out of it.

"What did you and Eren-San talk about when we had lunch?" She asked.

Ai wasn't expecting that question, though she kind of could expect it. After all, Aqua already showed some fear with Ai devoting time to someone else, so it made sense if Ruby had the same fears.

"We only got to know each other." Ai smiled.

"Really?" Ruby asked. "What did he say about himself?"

"Well." Ai began, trying to phrase it in a way that would be easily understood by a four-year-old. "Eren came from overseas, and he had a big family." She tried to explain.

"Where are they?" Ruby asked.

"Eren didn't say, but I'm sure they're still there." Ai said, not wanting to bring up the concept of death to either of her children. "Eren came

here alone so he was pretty lonely. So mama wanted to help him adjust." She said proudly.

"Was he mean?" Ruby asked.

"What?" Ai asked. "What made you think that?"

"Well, you got really sad a couple of times mama." Ruby noticed.

Ai wasn't surprised she noticed. Even if she didn't understand what they were saying, Ai knew that Ruby could still pick up on her mannerisms.

"No, Eren-San was really nice." Ai smiled, not wanting her daughter to know her past. "Mama only got sad because I told him a bit of being an idol. You know, how much work it is and how little time I spend with you because of it." That brightened her day.

Aqua listened to the conversation and predictably knew it was a lie. He did hear the whole conversation after all. Once again, Ai deflected the question so as not to worry her children. Ruby didn't pick up on it due to her own inexperience and her lack of English speaking abilities.

"Can you teach me English mama?" Ruby asked.

"You want to learn now?" Ai asked.

Ai always intended to teach her children English, but she wanted to wait a bit so they could focus on their Japanese abilities first. Though they did show a surprising grasp of Japanese already at such a young age.

"Yea, that way I can get to know Eren-San too." She smiled.

Ai's heart was warmed a bit. Ruby always copied her and wanted to follow everything she did. So it was natural that she too would want to get to know someone that was close to her mother.

Aqua knew this as well and wasn't surprised by his sister's reasoning. She was as innocent and naive as Ai. He didn't know what life Ruby had before her death, so he didn't know what struggles she had growing up. Ruby always refused to share, but he could tell she was young when she died.

"Sure!" Ai exclaimed in excitement. "We can learn together so you can help me with my English lessons."

"That's awesome!" Ruby said in excitement.

"What about you Aqua?" Ai asked. "Want to learn too?"

"Sure." Aqua said.

His sister looked a bit upset at having him involved too, especially since she always tried to hog their mother's attention, but Aqua realized it would be good so he could stop hiding his English speaking abilities.

After they finished eating, Ai picked up their plates and carried them over to the sink. She balanced them with ease since she always cleaned up after eating and placed them in the sink.

"Oh no." Ai remembered something. "I forgot to check the mail."

"I got it Ai." Aqua said as he made his way to the door.

"Make sure you don't go any further outside Aqua." She said.

"I won't, I'll be fine." It's only mail.

Aqua put on a pair of flip flops near the door and opened it to get at the mailbox. He had to get on his toes to reach it, but it was low enough for him to open it and take out the mail.

He rummaged through the mail really quick, checking to see what it was. Mainly bills such as phone bills and rent for the apartment. They name was addressed to an alias that Ai used so no one could

track her location. Aqua knew their financial situation could be better, another thing Ai always hid from them, but they weren't living paycheck to paycheck either. Especially in the past two years as Ai got more work as an idol.

Aqua felt a presence behind him as he looked through the mail. He turned around and suddenly froze in fear.

It's him...

Before Aqua could react, the hooded man grabbed him by the neck and easily lifted him up. His small frame and weight almost nothing compared to the fully grown man who lifted him up and barged his way into the opened apartment. Aqua tried to warn Ai by screaming but his voice was cut off as the man gripped his throat.

However, he heard Ai gasp in surprise at the sudden intrusion, then go silent as she saw what was going on.

Aqua noticed that they were now in the main room, Ai standing on one side while standing protectively in front of her daughter. Aqua and the man were on the side where the exit was, preventing his mother and sister from running.

Aqua was aware that a knife was to his throat. He felt a familiar feeling as the man held him there. His previous life was ended by this man, and he recognized him.

This was the man who wanted to kill Ai while she was pregnant. The same man who killed him four years ago. Now he was here, and Ai was completely at his mercy.

"I finally found you." He said in a crazed voice. "I'll make you pay for what you did."

Sorry for the cliff hanger, but I had to do it lol.

Debated on if I should do this now or next chapter, but I decided to start it here. It'll obviously play out different than the show, so there'll be changes.

One thing I hope is how I am explaining Eren's thoughts in this chapter. I try to keep him in character and stay consistent as much as possible, but after the rumbling, I do wonder how messed up Eren's sense of morality is afterwards. Where he is unsure what is morally right anymore or even if that applies to him anymore. After all, no matter what he does, is it any worse than what he did during the rumbling? I feel like there are many ways for his character to go.

Anyway, I'm excited to write the next chapter. Hope it meets expectations lol.

Ai and Her Family are Attack

Chapter 11: Ai and Her Family are Attacked

Ai was terrified as the hooded man entered into her home and held a knife to her struggling sons throat. Her voice died in her throat as she saw the man show obvious intent to harm her child.

Ruby whimpered as Ai shifted her daughter behind her, hoping to use her own body as a shield if need be. She didn't understand why the man was showing such a threatening display towards her and was terrified, worried something might happen to Aqua.

Aqua struggled to breath as the man kept a firm grip on his neck. He tried to struggle out of his grasp, even with the knife near his throat, but not only was he too weak, but with all the weight on his neck he needed both hands to grip the man's wrist and hold himself up.

He could tell this was the same man that killed him four years ago. It filled him with anger at how he returned to try and finish the job. He had no idea how he found them, but he did and now he was a threat to his new mother and sister.

Aqua didn't want to die again. However, he also needed to find some way to save Ai. If he had to die in order to protect her again, he knew he would. Ai would be devastated, after all, as a mother she felt compelled to protect her children. However, Aqua felt he was the one responsible to protect her since he made that promise when he was still an adult.

"I finally found you." He said in a crazed voice. "I'll make you pay for what you did."

Ai was now sure of what was going on. This man was a fan, though unlike some fans that would just be happy to see her, this one was

an obsessed fan. He knew that she had children, and she could tell that he felt betrayed by that.

"Please-" Ai was cut off.

"Don't you dare try to say anything!" He yelled at her. "You lied to us! To all of us!" He accused.

"I-" Ai tried again.

"You always pretend to love us! To love your fans!" He monologued. "But you go and get pregnant! Even when you would claim that you loved us!"

So that's it. He was hurt by her having children.

Normally, a person would feel that this was unfair. That it was unfair to expect a person to remain celibate and childless in order to appease her fans. That her fans should try to accept her decision to have a family because it brought her happiness.

However, Ai felt bad for the man. He seemed like he loved her, if in a twisted way. Ai had no idea what love was, maybe this is what it was. They always say in movies and books that people do terrible things for love. So maybe this is what this was. She felt terrible and hurt at the thought.

However, Ai also knew that her children were in danger right now. Aqua still had a knife to his throat, just centimeters away from ending his life. Every fiber of Ai's being was screaming at her that this was unacceptable. That that knife should be at her throat and not her child's throat.

She trembled as she saw her son struggle. He looked so tiny and vulnerable in the man's grasp. His cute little face, which normally showed stoicism and even strength, was now scrunched up in pain and fear as he struggled to breathe.

"And you're scared!" The man screamed. "Scared about what happens to this worthless kid! Scared about his safety! Not giving a damn about your fans!"

"Yes, I'm scared." Ai said, hoping that if she can calm him down, she can turn his attention on her and not Aqua.

Aqua tried to speak. Tried so desperately to say something, anything. But all he could do was take another breath as the man tightened around his neck. If this continued, he'd probably pass out. He had to fight back. He had to do something to save Ai. Anything. Even if it was just a window to run and get help.

"I loved you!" He said. "I loved you so much and you go and betray me! You never loved any of us!"

"You're right." Ai said, taking the man by surprise.

Ai got down on her knees, tried to make herself as low and docile as possible, hoping to beg and throw away any dignity she had if it meant turning his anger on her and giving her kids a chance to escape.

"What?" The man questioned, letting his grip relax a bit which caused his grip to loosen a bit.

"I lied to you. I lied to everyone." She said, which she could also feel was the truth. "The truth is, I never knew what it was like to feel loved, or even be loved in return."

"So, you just lied to us?" He asked, voice still full of anger.

"Yes." She said honestly. "I did lie. I lied about loving you because I never knew what it was like to love."

"That makes no sense!" He denied.

Aqua couldn't help but think the man is a complete Hippocrates. Makes no sense? He's the one holding a four-year-old hostage

because he apparently can't get a girlfriend and is accusing Ai of lying to her fans when it is all a damn act. At least his confusion relaxed his grip a bit so Aqua wouldn't pass out.

"I told myself, that if I lied about loving others then eventually, I would believe that lie." Ai said. "I could understand how it feels to love and be loved. I could finally understand what that would mean."

"But you-" Now the stalker was cut off.

"But because of that, I hurt the fans who have done so much for me." She said. "Maybe I am just a terrible woman."

"You don't give a damn about any of us!" He screamed. "You probably can't even remember me, why would you care!?"

How the hell was Ai supposed to remember nearly a million fans you psycho!? Aqua screamed in his head since all that came out of his mouth was a gasp from the chocking.

"I think I do remember you." She said as she looked at his face. "Ryosuke, right?"

Even Aqua was surprised she remembered, and he could tell that this "Ryosuke" was surprised as well given how relaxed his grip got.

"You... remember?" He asked, his breathing now getting faster.

"Yes. You gave me a gift. I remember how shy and timid you were." She smiled at him. "I still have it displayed." She pointed to the wall, showing the gift that he gave her.

"You-" Ryosuke tried to speak.

"I'm sorry I couldn't love you for real." Ai said. "I'm a terrible human. I lied to all of you and it's all my fault you are this way."

Aqua wondered if she was saying all this just to try and calm him down. He'll admit, even he was surprised she remembered his

name. But he also felt that this was more than a lie to protect him. He wondered if Ai really believed any of this nonsense.

"Ah!" Ryosuke screamed as Aqua bit him in the hand.

His grip got loose enough to where Aqua could bite and hopefully get the man to release him. In the struggle, Ryosuke threw him forward towards Ai. Aqua landed on his side, feeling pain but luckily, he could tell there was no damage since he was still four and likely still had a lot of cartilage in his body. He could probably fall from the second story and only get slightly hurt at this age.

Aqua stood up and quickly scanned the room. Looking for anything he could use to fight back. He had to protect Ai and Ruby. If he was dying again, he'll make sure Ai is safe.

However, he was prevented from acting as Ai reached out and grabbed him. She pulled him into her body protectively so that his back was pressed into her torso. Her arms wrapped around him, and her chin rested on his head, adopting a pose to protect as much of his body as possible from an attack.

"Ai, let go!" He tried to say.

"Please Ryosuke." She pleaded. "The person who caused you this pain is me. It's only me. Please punish me and not my children. They're innocent. They never hurt you."

Ryosuke looked conflicted and confused. Unsure of what he should do.

"Please, just let them go. Let them go outside and you can do what you want with me. If you need to hurt me to feel better, I'll understand." Tears began to leak from her eyes. "But please don't punish them. They did nothing. I was the one to give birth to them. I raised them, and I chose to have them. It's all my fault. So please punish me. Please."

Aqua's hearts filled with rage at how Ai begged the man to spare her children. Just like a good mother, she threw away her dignity and her pride in order to ensure the best chance to reason with the man and save her children. Even if it cost her life.

Ai glanced towards the door as she saw movement. This caused Ryosuke to look behind him and saw a man wearing a pair of jeans and a grey T-shirt. His hair was long and undone, partially obscuring his face.

Suddenly, his face contorted with rage again.

"You say all that, but I saw you with this man!" He accused. "What is he to you? Is he your lover? Is he their father!?"

"No!" Ai tried to reason, terrified if something were to happen with Eren. "He's only my neighbor. We met last week. He's no one to me."

Something about the way she denied that sounded different to Aqua compared to what she said earlier. As if she was lying now, whereas everything beforehand was the truth.

"Please, he doesn't even know Japanese. Please just let my kids leave with him. Please." She pleaded again. "Punish me, not them. Please."

Ryosuke relented a bit. He didn't know what he was going to do. His thoughts and feelings were a mess that he didn't know why he was so conflicted. He came here to take revenge and now he felt off.

Ai hoped that his indecision was a cue that he would let them go. She didn't want Eren to get hurt, after all, the man had a knife. If Eren tried to fight, she had no doubt that he would get hurt. He had nothing to do with them and didn't deserve to be hurt or killed over someone as terrible as her.

"*Eren.*" She called out in English. "*Please take my children and get out of here.*" She pleaded, hoping that he would listen to her and

avoid dying.

"Ai!" Aqua said, forgetting that he's not supposed to know what she said. "I'm not leaving you to him! Just let me go!" He tried to convince her so he could at the very least do something other than cower.

"It's ok Aqua-Chan." Ai said gently. "I'll be ok."

Aqua heard Ruby whimper behind him, still paralyzed by the fear of only having her mother stand between her and the psycho. But even if she couldn't say anything, she gripped harder onto the clothes on Ai's back, wordlessly saying she didn't want to leave.

"You're ok Ruby-Chan." Ai soothed. "Mama will be alright. I promise."

Ever the liar she was. Ai couldn't even tell the truth to her own children. She truly was a terrible person.

But at least they'll be ok. They'll grow up happy and healthy. She imagined Ruby dressed in a cute little school outfit as she would talk about her first day in school. Or how Aqua might come home one day with a girl he asked out on a date. She imagined Ruby crying from her first broken heart and Aqua maybe coming home after a fight with another boy. All the mischief and wonderful things they would do.

Her heart broke as she realized she would probably never see any of it. She would sacrifice herself here so that her children will live. After all, she was a terrible mother.

She never said she loved her children. Not once did she ever say those words. She was always such a coward. She wasn't going to die here without letting them hear the words. Even if it did turn out to be a lie, at least they can live after hearing those words.

However, her voice died in her throat as she looked over to Eren. Ryosuke's focus was on the man for the past few moments, and she

could see why.

Eren's face, normally so calm and neutral, was replaced with a look of complete rage.

*"MOOOM!" Eren screamed as he ran up the hill towards his house.
"MOOOOOM!"*

His house, the same outline he saw every single day coming home was no longer there. Instead, a massive rock fell on the house, completely destroying it. He was terrified at the thought of something happening to his mother.

Eren got to the house and noticed his mother partially sticking out of the debris. Only her upper half was exposed, meaning she was still alive. Eren felt a bit of relief when she moved and moaned his name, but he knew he had to act fast before the Titans come for them.

"Mikasa, grab that end and hoist with everything you got." He said to Mikasa as he kneeled down to lift the massive weight.

Eren tried to lift with all his strength, but it wasn't working. No matter how hard he tried, he couldn't move the weight from his mother.

Suddenly, he felt the ground shake as he looked up in horror at what he saw. The Titans were getting closer, he knew he would have no time to save his mother.

"Hurry up damn it!" He yelled at Mikasa.

"I'm trying!" She cried out.

"It's them..." his mother said in realization. "You've got to get out of here." She ordered. "Eren, just take Mikasa and run, now!" She yelled.

"I want to more than anything!" Eren said. "But first I need you on your feet!"

"Sweety listen to me, my legs have been crushed." His mother said in horror. "Even if you can get me out of here I can't run. There's no time."

"Whatever I can carry you!" Eren countered as the beam slipped a bit out of his grasp.

"Will you just shut up and listen to me for once in your life!" She yelled, trying to do anything to make him run away. "One thing I'm asking you! One thing!" She tried to reason with him. "Mikasa make him." She pleaded to her adopted daughter.

"I can't." Mikasa whimpered as she continued to try to lift the beam pinning her legs.

"You want all three of us to die?" She asked, hoping to at least guilt her son into running away.

Suddenly, the sound of cables and gas sounded above her. Hannes, a friend of the families, came down on his ODM and rushed over to the scene.

"Hannes." His mother gasped in surprise. "Take the children and get them out of here." She pleaded.

"Come on Carla, that's not our only option." Hannes smiled. "Hey, I'm a trained Soldier. My skillset is killing Titans and saving lives!" He said in determination as he drew a blade and charged at the nearest titan.

"No wait!" Carla begged. "Don't do this, please!"

Eren could barely hear what was going on around him. He was so fixated on lifting the house. So fixated on removing this one beam so

his mother could crawl to safety. He couldn't let her die. He couldn't. He refused to watch his mother die today.

But she did die. She did her job as a mother and that was sacrifice herself for her children. He watched as Hannes came back and dragged him and Mikasa away. Watched as his mother was lifted from the rubble before having her back snapped in half. Watched her lifeless body get consumed by the monster, that smiling monster.

"There's nothing you could have done." He remembered Hannes say to him after it happened. "You're a kid, you're weak."

No, Eren refused to accept that. He was a fighter. He was ready to do what he had to do. He'd make Hannes pay for taking him away. He knew he could have saved her.

"I'm worse." Hannes voice broke. "When the time came I was too scared to hold my ground." He began to cry as Eren's rage was replaced with sadness and realization. "You're mother died because I'm a damn coward."

Yes, she died. Eren tried so hard to deny it. He tried so hard not to see it. But that moment, seeing the confident and strong Mr. Hannes brake down like that made him realize the truth. She died. She sent her children away to safety while she died in their place. And the one man who could have done something failed due to his own fear.

Eren was furious. For probably the first time in years, he felt that familiar rage build up inside him. He felt the tunnel vision of that rage consume him, unable to see anyone but the man who threatened a mother and her children. A man who forced that mother to plead with someone to take her children to safety while she died in their place.

But Eren wasn't Hannes, and this man wasn't a Titan.

Eren moved slowly towards the man, who recognized that he was in danger. Ai told him to run, but Eren never would run from a fight.

Eren was too strong and sure in his own abilities to run from this coward. He could even tell how he held the knife that this man was a complete armature.

It would be easy.

" *Please Eren!* " Ai tried to beg him. " *Don't fight him. Please. I don't want you getting hurt.* "

Hurt? She thought he'd get hurt? Did she know what he was capable of? This man wasn't even a threat to him. He could have a gun and Eren still wouldn't see him as a threat.

"Get away you bastard!" He said something in Japanese.

"Ryosuke, please don't!" Ai begged. "Please don't hurt him. Please just let him take my kids."

Eren couldn't hear them anymore. All he could hear was his own heart as the rage consumed him. That feeling, that feeling of charging into the enemy without a plan returned. After he kissed Historia's hand, he never felt his rage again after that. He felt anger and his own survival instincts. But it was never the same rage as before. It was always calculated and calm, something that he could control and maintain a tactical awareness of the battlefield with.

This rage felt familiar though. The same rage he felt when Thomas died, or when Annie betrayed them. Or when he fought Reiner for the first time.

"Get back!" He screamed, though Eren couldn't understand him.

In his fear, Ryosuke grabbed the knife in a reverse grip and ran over to stab Eren right in the collar bone.

"NO!" Ai screamed, terrified of something happening to Eren because of her own failure as an idol.

The knife stopped right at Eren's collarbone. Ryosuke was unable to go any further since Eren reached out with his hand and effortlessly grabbed his wrist and prevented Ryosuke from stabbing him.

Ryosuke tried to struggle, but Eren's grip was too strong. He could barely even move Eren's arm with how strong he was.

Eren reached up with his other hand and grabbed the back of the knife, using the leverage in his hips to guide the struggling man's hands down and back, right into his chest.

Ryosuke gasped as the knife went directly into the right side of his chest. He gasped and almost screamed but Eren didn't let him.

Eren slammed him into the wall and grabbed Ryosuke's mouth, silencing him. All he could see was that damned smiling Titan, Dina Fritz, who stole his mother away from him. All logic and context to his mother's death was lost as he squeezed Ryosuke's mouth. He felt the man's teeth through his cheeks as he squeezed so hard, making the man gasp in pain from behind Eren's hand.

Eren grabbed the handle of the knife, still imbedded in the man and twisted, intent on making him feel the same pain he was about to inflict on an innocent woman. The man screamed into his hand as not only was the pain increased, but Eren felt his teeth begin to break from the pressure he applied with his hand.

Eren couldn't tell what was going on right now. He was lost in his own world as he caused this man suffering. How dare this man try to steal a woman from her children. How dare he. He would make the man pay. Any man that killed a woman in front of her children deserves the worst possible death.

Suddenly, that rage dissipated, and the man dropped down to the ground as Eren released him. Ryosuke coughed blood and teeth as his lung was pierced and his mouth was a mess. Blood leaked from his mouth and tears streamed down his face.

He saw an opportunity to run from the scare man, and Ryosuke took it. With nothing more than adrenalin and fear, he stood up and ran as fast as he could out the door, hoping to get to safety away from Eren.

Eren vaguely thought that he would die soon. With a collapsed lung, there was no medical technology in Marley that can save something like that. Maybe this world would be different, but once the adrenalin wears off, he would die from blood loss and asphyxiation.

Eren's thoughts turned inward, and his own hypocrisy was made bare to him. How many mothers did he kill? How many families were in that apartment building behind the stage? How many innocent mothers did he crush during the rumbling.

He remembered a moment in the paths. One of the groups of Titans cornered a bunch of people on a cliff. A woman with a baby was pushed off the cliff, but in the last minute she pushed her baby back into the crowd. The crowd did what they could to preserve the child's life for as long as possible, pushing it further and further back even as people were pushed by the mob to their deaths.

He didn't remember what happened to the baby. The rumbling stopped before the baby died. he guessed he survived. Survived without a mother. A mother who died because of some psychopath who chose an island over the entirety of humanity.

Eren covered his mouth as he felt sick.

He didn't dare look at Ai or her children. He wondered if she was terrified of him. Eren let himself lapse into his old self. The version of him that would charge headfirst into a fight and damn the consequences. Now he would be questioned by the authorities here and potentially discovered.

He didn't even know why he came here. He heard shouting from next door and decided to check it out. He honestly didn't expect the stalker to attack while he was still nearby, but he did. And Eren didn't know why, but the thought of Ai being hurt just made him angry. She

was so kind and nice that the thought of her dying didn't sit well with him at all.

Not like it matters now. He let himself get too involved and now he risked his safety. He had nowhere to go. No other home besides this cheap and legally dubious apartment that Sergie recommended to him.

So Eren decided to just leave. He decided to do the job the boss gave him tonight instead of waiting for tomorrow.

" *Eren!* " Ai called out, though Eren was already outside by the time she did.

Ai was partially in shock after Eren left. She didn't know how to feel or what to do. She just continued to kneel on the ground with her daughter gripping at her back and her son safely in her arms. She was too frightened to even move.

"Ai, are you ok?" Aqua asked.

"Wha-" Ai tried to say as she looked down at her son.

"It's ok Ai." Aqua said in a soothing tone. "We're safe." He tried to console her.

Why did he try to make her feel better? She's the adult and his other. She should be the one making sure he was ok. Her son was always a brave boy, but to show such little effect from what just happened was not normal.

"It's ok Aqua-Chan." Ai said instead, trying to cheer him up. He must be putting on a brave face after what happened, and Ai wanted to make sure that he would be shown care after what happened.

"M-mama-" Ruby cried from behind her.

"Ruby-Chan, come here." She said lovingly as Ruby cried behind her.

Ruby ran around Ai's body and dived into Ai's waiting embrace. She managed to turn Aqua around so that both of her children were safe and secure in her arms. She felt like crying, but now was not the time. She needed to remain strong in front of her children so that they would feel safe.

Ai didn't have time to process what happened. She needed to act now and ensure her children would remain safe tonight. She needed to make sure that they weren't attacked again tonight.

Ai got up and ran over to her phone, leaving her children for a moment. Ruby was reluctant to let go of her, but she needed to understand that Ai was getting help.

Ai debated calling the police, but there was always a chance that she could be exposed from them as well. It would result in a police report and likely get on the news. She wasn't sure if that would be good because it would expose everything and put herself and her children in danger again.

Instead, Ai got her phone and dialed for President Saitou. She heard it ring before he picked up.

"Ai..." He said in a sleepy voice. "Why are you calling this late-"

"President, please. We need help." Ai said, though she tried to keep her voice from wavering in front of her children.

"What's wrong?" He asked.

"We were attacked." She said.

"What!?" The President was now up, and she heard Miyako-San stir in the background as she too woke up. "What do you mean you were attacked?" He asked.

"We were attacked by a fan who broke in." She said.

"Are you ok?" He asked.

"Yes, there's no injury." Ai said. "I don't know what to do." She said.

"You lock the door and wait for me to get there." He said. "Don't you open it for anyone. If you suspect anyone is trying to force their way in, you call the police. Secrecy be damned." He ordered.

"O-ok." Ai said in a meek voice.

Ai ran over to the door which Eren closed behind him and double checked to make sure it was locked. Luckily, Japan was unique compared to many countries in that most doors were heavy duty in order to prevent them from being forcefully opened. If Aqua didn't get the mail, it's likely Ryosuke wouldn't have been able to force his way in.

After that, Ai decided she would try to get her children away from the main room. She needed to keep them calm so that they wouldn't get upset or panic. The only thing that consumed her thoughts right now was their safety.

"Mama?" Ruby asked.

"Listen Ruby-Chan." Ai said as she kneeled down to her kids. "You too Aqua-Chan." Her beautiful and loving smile remained plastered on her face and her voice was as soothing as ever. "I need you two to go into the bedroom and get some rest." She said.

"We're not leaving you here Mama." Ruby said.

"I know dear." Ai said. "But right now, I need you two to be strong for mama. Can you do that?" She asked.

"What about you?" Aqua asked.

"Mama is going to stay here and wait for the President. He's going to come over and protect us. Ok?" She told them.

"I want you with us Mama." Ruby cried.

"I know Ruby-Chan, but right now mama has to stay here and make sure we're safe. Ok?" She tried to reason.

"What about Eren?" Aqua asked.

"Right now, we need to focus on staying safe." Ai said, shelving her thoughts on what she just saw for the moment so she can focus on keeping him safe.

"He basically killed him Ai." Aqua said with seriousness.

How does her son understand the concept of death like that? He's only four.

"It's ok Aqua." Ai said. "That was scary, but we need to not think about it right now." She tried to say.

"He looked dangerous Ai." Aqua said.

"H-he saved our lives." Ruby chimed in.

"Yes, he did." Ai agreed. "So, we're going to not think about any of this and get some rest right now. We'll figure out what to do tomorrow."

Aqua relented and so did Ruby. Ai pushed them into the bedroom and closed the door, making sure to tell them to lock it from the inside so they could have another layer of protection in case something happened.

Ai went over to the couch to sit down. She had both the main door and the bedroom door within her sights so she could remain on guard so her children can rest. She didn't feel tired or sleepy at all. Every fiber of her being was on high alert, her fight or flight instincts

in full overdrive. She would be ready to fight, run, or even beg to ensure her children remained safe.

She was going to protect them, no matter what.

Aqua was unable to sleep. The excitement and fear hit Ruby hard, and she was already asleep in the Futon, but Aqua remained fully awake.

How did that man find them? Was it Eren? No, it couldn't be. If Eren was responsible, he likely wouldn't have saved Ai. Plus, Eren and this Ryosuke didn't seem to know each other. Aqua may have distrusted Eren, but he didn't think Eren was capable of hurting Ai.

Then what? There was no way Ryosuke was able to find them a second time. Not unless he was a master of hacking or something. Even as an infant, he overheard all the conversations Ai had with the President in protecting her identity. There was just no way anyone could not only track Ai down here, but also at the hospital she stayed at.

The only one who knew who she was, was him. And he knows for a fact that he didn't accidentally leak the information.

Then what? What made it so Ryosuke was able to find her twice when no one else could? He doubted Eren was even able to relay information since he had no Japanese abilities. Ryosuke didn't even seem to speak English at all. So how?

Think, there has to be something missing. Some piece of the puzzle that he's missing.

Who would know that Ai was in the hospital? There was the President and Miyako. Miyako was a prime suspect, after all she did nearly release Ai's information, however with the way she acted, that was the first time she considered it. Even then, since only Ryosuke attacked twice, it would mean someone specifically contacted him.

Miyako was a gold digger, but he doubted she would be capable of being an accessory to murder. The President of course was out since he depended on Ai for the success of his business.

One of the other B-Komachi girls? It would make sense. They all took a hit to their career when Ai got pregnant, and they had to do performances without her. However, even if there were rivalries that he didn't see, losing Ai would basically be a death blow to B-Komachi and the girl's careers would be ruined anyway.

What happened recently that could have compromised Ai's location.

Ai never contacts anyone outside of her small circle of colleagues. Not once has she ever contacted anyone that wasn't in her group. So there is no way she could have revealed anything.

Wait... there was one person she contacted.

Before the concert, when Ruby joked about Eren becoming their father, Aqua knew Ai contacted their real father. She tried to hide it, but it was obvious. She contacted him, and a few days later, a psycho stalker that has been hunting her for years shows up to her doorstep.

As likely as the scenario is, a single timeline isn't enough evidence to prove anything. There has to be more to it.

However, this ex of hers was their biological father. Meaning, there was a good chance he was informed of where she would be treated and even what room she would be in. He's the only other person Ai would contact. He now knew that Ai had no family, or at least no family she kept in contact with. It would be incredibly easy for her ex to leak her information.

But if he leaked her information to one person and not to the media, it meant he specifically chose Ryosuke as his contact. He specifically chose a man who would kill Ai as the one to know where she was.

Not only that, if Aqua was correct, it would mean that he did it a second time now.

His biological father, the ex-boyfriend that Aqua knew abused Ai, wanted her dead. He was trying to kill her. Once four years ago when she was pregnant, and now again after learning of Ai's location.

But why, why would he try to kill his ex-girlfriend, the mother of his children? Ruby guessed he may also have been an actor. It was just as possible he was a producer who was in an authoritative position over her. If that was the case, Ai being discovered to be the mother of his children could end his career. Especially if any information of abuse was brought to light.

However, that still didn't fit because why take the risk in creating a trail to have someone murdered. If he was discovered, he would be charged with murder and his life would be worse than a simple pregnancy controversy.

Ai didn't know who his father was or why he decided to have Ai killed. But Aqua was very sure that the one who leaked Ai's information was his father. There could be no one else. No one else could have known where Ai was four years ago, and they were only attacked days after she contacted him. It had to be him.

If he tried once to have her killed, he would try again. Ai was in danger from someone she may or may not entirely trust.

Ai needed to protect her. He needed to ensure Ai remained safe above all else. Not only Ai, but Ruby as well. If their father was capable of killing Ai, it was entirely possible they could die as well. Aqua could accept his own death, he's living a life he shouldn't have had anyway. But Ruby, she didn't deserve that. She didn't deserve to die young again.

He would find a way to protect Ai, even if that means killing his own father. Ai had no relationship with the man. He didn't even think of

the faceless man as his father. But he swore that no matter what, he would keep Ai safe and find a way to stop him.

But how? It's not like he had years to prepare and learn the truth. He would likely try again soon. Which means Aqua would be forced to defend his mother as a four-year-old child. Even if he could do anything, Ai would shield him and sacrifice herself again like she did tonight. There was no way Ai would ever let him protect her since he was her son. She would gladly die to protect him. That's something Aqua couldn't accept.

But there was one person who showed an ability to protect Ai. Eren Yeager, the foreigner next door. Not only did he protect Ai and Ruby, but Eren showed he was extremely good at fighting and didn't shy away from potentially killing a man. While Aqua would normally be suspicious of this and even considered using his childish act to sabotage any kind of relationship they could have after getting to know him, Aqua couldn't deny that Eren was very skilled.

Damn, he was considering playing match maker and finding a way to ensure Ai and Eren got close. He didn't need them to be romantically involved, but if he could at least ensure a strong friendship between them, it could be a way to protect Ai. Aqua was useless in a fight. Even as Goro he was useless. He took some martial arts classes when he was in school, but he was nowhere near good enough to actually fight. Even then, he's four. No amount of training is going to allow him to beat a full-grown man.

So that's the plan. Find a way to kill his father and get Eren and Ai together in order to ensure she had someone who could protect her. As much as he was worried about Eren's past and how it could be dangerous to Ai, there were bigger threats than that.

"That's what I'll do." He said out loud, confident in his abilities to protect Ai. He had to protect her, no matter what.

And there we go. I know a lot of people want Ryosuke to suffer a bit more, but I felt like this would be appropriate for Eren's growth.

I don't think it's spoilers to say since I'll mention it in the next chapter, but Ryosuke is dead. A knife to the lung can be pretty fatal in a lot of situations, especially if you don't get immediate help. Even if you don't pull the knife out, the expansion of air into the chest cavity can cause the other lung to be unable to inflate, functionally causing death by suffocation.

As for Aqua, I felt it adds an interesting problem for him. He now knows what he did in the Anime, however he is completely unable to do anything since he's four. He also doesn't have the benefit of waiting till he's a teenager since Ai survived and will be in danger again. So, Aqua has to find a way to learn the truth and defend Ai as a four-year-old. Which brings its own unique challenges to overcome.

Plus, it also makes sense for him to play match maker with Eren and Ai. Even if he doesn't really trust Eren, it's realistically his best bet.

So, I hope this chapter met expectations and sets up the next bit of content for you guys.

The Aftermath of the Attack

Chapter 12: The Aftermath of the Attack

"Ruby! Aqua!" Ai screamed as she jumped up from her slumber.

She had a terrible dream of her children being attacked by a stranger, a result of the fear she had from the attack last night. Ai had to still her breathing and get herself back into check.

"Ai, are you ok?" She heard Miyako ask.

"Miyako-San?" She asked in confusion.

Ai was still on the couch, though she had a pillow and blanket on her, which kept her warm. She was still dressed in her clothes, but she had a light sheen of cold sweat that made them slightly damp.

"Oh, just a bad dream." Miyako said.

"What happened?" She asked.

"You were asleep sitting up when we got here." Miyako said as she sat down next to Ai. "We just made you a bit more comfortable." She said.

Miyako had a spare key in case she needed to drop things off at the house, so she was easily able to get in.

"Is she awake?" Ai heard the President come into the room from the main hall.

"Yea, just still a bit shaken up." Miyako said.

"I'm glad." He said as he sat on the opposite side of Ai. "Are you doing ok Ai?" He asked in a concerned tone.

Suddenly, all the fear and terror from last night hit Ai. With no adrenaline or protective maternal instincts to clear her mind, Ai felt the full force of what happened last night hit her.

"I-" She struggled to say as her eyes began to leak tears of fear and sadness.

Ai fell into Miyako's arms as she started to cry and sob. Her confident and protective persona now gone and in its place was the fear and terror of a young girl who nearly lost her life. She sobbed into Miyako's arms, who rubbed her back and told her it would be ok. Ichigo stayed quiet through the whole thing, unable to speak because of his own fears of losing the girl who he saw as a daughter.

Miyako felt sad and guilty, knowing there was a point in time where she was almost the cause of this. If it wasn't for that divine moment where Kami possessed the kids, she would have been the one to ruin Ai's life.

"It's ok Ai, you're safe." Ichigo said as he placed a hand on her back and rubbed it. He wasn't good at comforting people.

"Aqua." She cried. "He was so small and helpless." She sobbed.

"Is he ok?" Miyako asked, her own heart stopped when she heard he was potentially hurt.

"He held him by his neck and held a knife to his throat. He looked so tiny and scared." She sobbed.

"They're sleeping Ai." Ichigo said. "We checked on them, they're fine. Just sleeping."

"We'll have breakfast prepared for you." Miyako said. "It's zero seven so it's still early."

"Mama?" They heard a tiny voice as Ruby opened the door.

Ruby stood looking at the group, her eyes were sad, and she looked just as tiny and vulnerable as Aqua did last night.

"Ai turned away from her daughter for a moment to wipe her eyes of tears. She took a deep breath before turning back to her daughter.

"Did you sleep ok Ruby-Chan?" Ai asked in a loving voice.

Her eyes, although dry of tears, still had some redness around them. She smiled and her voice didn't waiver.

Ruby may have gotten their attention, but Aqua opened the door first. He saw Ai crying and sobbing into Miyako's arms.

"Were you crying mama?" Ruby asked.

"Nope." Ai smiled. "Mama is too strong to cry. they're just red because mama slept on her face." She lied.

Aqua saw once again how much of an expert Ai was at lying. Even with all these emotions and fears she was experiencing right now, still she showed a calm, loving, and confident mother persona when her children were around. Any pain or hesitation in her voice was gone, replaced with a sweet and beautiful voice that made even him calm and feeling safe.

If there was ever a time he truly admired her ability to lie, it was here. She ensured that no matter how she felt, her children would feel safe and secure while she was there.

"Oh no, Aqua." Ai got up and ran to her son. She almost slid on the floor as she got on her knees in front of him.

"What?" He asked.

Ai traced a finger along his neck, making him wince slightly from the pain on his neck. Her face went from loving to concerned when she saw him wince.

"You have a bruise all over your neck." She said. "Stupid!" She berated herself. "I was so caught up in my thoughts I didn't make sure you were ok. Don't worry, mama will get some ice."

Ai stood up and ran to the freezer. She pulled out some ice from the tray and placed it in a plastic Ziplock bag before sealing it. She then wrapped it in a paper towel in order to ensure the ice didn't touch his skin directly. After she was done, she almost slid to her knees again and gently placed it on his neck.

"It's ok." She soothed as Aqua winced again. "Just keep this on so you can get better."

"I don't think that's how that works exactly." Aqua argued.

He saw the bruising and it actually wasn't bad. You actually don't want to ice minor bruises all that much. Bruising is the body's natural way of inducing blood flow in a damaged area in order to repair it in a faster way. This is why bruising occurs. You only want to apply liberal amounts of ice if there is swelling that could otherwise impede movement or normal bodily functions.

"Nonsense, mama is always right." Ai said, her lack of medical knowledge apparent.

Despite his years of medical school, no one would listen to a child. He also didn't want to explain how he knew so much, so Aqua relented and grabbed the ice pack and held it to his neck.

"There, doctor Ai is here to help." She smiled.

She tried so hard to keep her children's mind off of what happen that Aqua could legitimately not see the fear and sadness she expressed earlier.

"Ai, we need to talk." President Ichigo said.

"Ok." She said.

"We need to know what happened last night." He said.

"And an explanation why me and my husband had to clean blood and teeth off of the floor." Miyako said.

Ai got up and sat on the couch, Ruby and Aqua on each of her knees as Ruby held onto Ai and Aqua maintained the ice bag on his neck. Aqua removed the ice from his neck after a bit.

"No Aqua-Chan, keep the ice on." Ai said.

He relented again, though didn't put pressure since if you did ice, you actually only wanted to leave it on for no longer than fifteen minutes before removing it. Since there was no swelling, he felt five minutes would be too much. But no one argues with doctor Ai apparently, though he'd like to see her PhD.

"Ai." Ichigo got her attention again.

Ai explained everything that happened. The initial attack where Ryosuke barged in with a knife to Aqua's throat, how he said typical stalkerish and psychotic things, and threatened her and her children. Ai explained only the facts of what happened, but intentionally left out her feelings or fears while Aqua and Ruby were present.

"Did you have to fight him off?" Miyako asked, referring to the blood she found which clearly wasn't theirs.

"No, the door was still open, so Eren actually came over." She said.

"Eren came in?" Ichigo asked.

"Yes, he protected us." Ai said. "Then he left... well, more like ran away." She clarified.

"What did he do?" Ichigo asked.

"He, fought him off." Ai's persona broke a moment as even Ichigo could tell that was a lie.

"Ai, I need to know what Eren did." He said.

Ai remained silent, looking down and was too unsure of what to say. She didn't want to say what Eren did because she knew exactly how Ichigo would react.

"Did he stab him Ai?" Ichigo asked.

"How did-" She was cut off.

"Look." Ichigo opened his phone.

Since Ai used both her hands to balance her children on her knees, Ichigo held the phone to her face so she could read the news article from this morning. It was an article on Ryosuke found a few kilometers away with a knife in his chest. It was assumed he escaped from his attacker, but he died on the street in the middle of the night before the police found him. It was so late that some eye witnesses saw him limp but assumed he was drunk, not noticing the knife that was lodged in his chest.

"Is that the man who attacked you?" Ichigo asked.

Ai's silence confirmed it. Ichigo sighed as he put his phone down, ensuring that the kids couldn't see it.

Aqua wasn't surprised he died. Chest wounds were dangerous if you didn't get immediate medical help. Under the ribs was the chest cavity, which is a vacuum inside the body that allows the lungs to expand. As the diaphragm contracts, air rushes into the lungs due to the pressure difference between the chest cavity and the lungs. If air was introduced into the chest cavity, the lungs would be unable to expand, and the person would be unable to breathe. Since there was a knife in him, it likely allowed air to enter without escaping.

Ryosuke likely died of asphyxiation as long as there wasn't any internal bleeding. His fear and adrenalin kept him running into the night until lack of oxygen caused him to make poor decisions, such

as not getting help. He was like an animal that was shot by a hunter by that point.

"Did Eren kill him?" He asked.

"No!" Ai defended quickly. "Eren tried to wrestle the knife free, and it accidentally hit Ryosuke."

Aqua raised his eyebrow. Did Ai remember things differently or was she intentionally lying to protect Eren.

"Ai, it was a kitchen knife. And according to the article, it went through the rib cage and went down to the handle in his chest." Ichigo said.

"He could have fell on it." Ai tried.

"Ai, you don't accidentally get it that deep while breaking through a rib." Ichigo said. "Eren stabbed him, didn't he?"

Ai had no argument anymore.

"Ai, I'm glad he protected you, but it's still murder." Ichigo said.

"Eren protected us!" Ai defended.

"The Police won't see it that way." Ichigo said. "Even if the kid attacked first, Eren is a foreigner. A criminal investigation and trial would be rigged against him. You know how poorly the legal system treats foreigners."

"No one will know it's him." Ai said. "We're not contacting the police, so we don't have to say anything."

Aqua saw the logic in that. With the knife in his chest preventing blood from leaking, it's very likely that there wasn't a blood trail that would lead back to them. Only his mouth bled and not nearly enough to leave a trail back to their home.

"Ai, he had to have done this before." Ichigo said.

"We don't know that." Ai argued.

"He killed a man with no hesitation. A normal person doesn't just bury a knife into someone's chest or crush their face with his hands. Yea, the article mentions that his upper jaw was cracked, and his molars are missing. I'm assuming the teeth we cleaned up was because of Eren."

"But he protected us." Ai tried again.

"Damn it Ai!" Ichigo grabbed Ai by the shoulders, scaring Ruby and Ai both. "I almost lost you today and you're defending someone as dangerous as him!?" Ichigo yelled in frustration.

"If anything happened to me-" Ai tried to say.

"I don't give a damn about B-Komachi!" Ichigo said angrily. "I almost lost you today. You think I care about that when after all this time I've been the one looking out for you? Do you think that if you died, that I could just go and find someone else. Even if the new person was better and more popular, do you think I'd want that?"

Why couldn't this dumb girl see how much Ichigo cared about her? She was basically like a daughter to him. He basically raised her and even helped to care for her children like some kind of young grandfather. And here she is, saying that her death would be easy for him to deal with.

"Ichigo." Miyako tried to calm her husband down.

Ichigo relaxed as he sat back into the couch, calming himself down. He almost lost Ai, his best performer and the girl he saw as a daughter. He didn't know if he'd be able to recover from that if she died.

"I'm sorry Ai." He apologized.

"It's ok." Ai said sadly.

"But please, I don't trust Eren." He said. "If he decided to hurt you, and I have no doubt he's capable of doing it, I could never live with myself. I know he saved you, but he shows not just the ability to kill, but that he clearly has experience."

"I understand President." Ai said. "But I can't just do that. He saved me and my children. We would be-" Ai stopped herself, unable to think of her two little babies in any other way than happy and healthy. "I need to make sure he's ok, and that he'll be safe."

"He saved mama President." Ruby said, her voice weak and scared. "How can he be a bad guy if he saved mama?"

"If it wasn't for him, we would be dead." Aqua said.

Aqua fully agreed with President Saitou. Eren was dangerous and showed that he probably had killed before. If Eren wanted to take advantage of Ai or hurt her in anyway, he could do so with ease. If it wasn't for the fact that Ai's potential killer was still out there, Aqua would use this moment to try and make Ai agree with President Saitou.

"Eren saved us, and we owe him to keep an open mind." Aqua said, already starting his match maker plan. He really hated that he was taking Eren's side in this.

"Ichigo, Eren did save them." Miyako said as she placed a hand on her husband's shoulder. "I don't trust him either, but we can't just treat Ai like a little girl either. You're not her father and can't dictate who she can and cannot see."

Can he not? Ichigo basically was her father after all these years.

"Fine." He relented, realizing that everyone was against him.

"Miyako-San is right." Aqua said. "Ai is a grown woman and doesn't need permission."

"I could just fire her." Ichigo said in a defeated tone.

"And lose B-Komachi?" Miyako asked.

"Don't worry Miyako-San, even if he fires me, I'll still show up for rehearsal." Ai's idol act was now showing itself as she smiled at her joke.

"Then I won't pay you." Ichigo continued the joke, though a bit reluctantly.

"I'll just ask Miyako-San for some money." Ai countered.

Ichigo smiled a bit at her change in attitude. If nothing else, he was glad she was safe and happy.

"Rehearsal was supposed to be today, but we'll cancel it." Ichigo said.

"What?" Ai asked. "But the others-"

"Will understand. If not, they'll have to talk to me." He said. "Just get some rest Ai, can you at least do that for me?" He pleaded.

"I'll try President." Ai said, though her voice was low. "I just don't want to hold the other girls back again."

"You won't." Ichigo said. "They'll understand after what happened." He said.

Ai took a moment to hold her children close to her body, feeling their warmth and breathing to remind herself that they're ok. She was so terrified of losing them last night that she couldn't get it out of her mind.

Although Eren showed how dangerous he was, Ai couldn't imagine him hurting her or her kids. It just didn't seem like something he would do. He protected them and defended them. He deserves nothing less than at least an open mind and not coming to conclusions based on something he did that was noble.

"Miyako-San is going to cook today." Ai said to her children.

"That's awesome!" Ruby said, getting her mind off of the previous events. "I love her cooking so much."

"Hey, what does that mean?" Ai asked, a jokingly offended tone clear in her voice. "What about mama's cooking?" She asked.

"It's ok." Ruby giggled, intentionally teasing her mama.

Night Prior

The restaurant that Eren reached was a simple location on a street he was unable to name. With how late it was, the restaurant was in the stages of closing for the night, so there were no customers. Eren didn't plan for that, but it ended up working to his advantage.

Eren walked into the restaurant that looked to have multiple booths with round plates in the center of the table, which appeared to be some kind of hearth or hot plate for cooking. There was a general red and brown color theme around the main room with oriental styled decorations. It looked similar to some of the decorations he remembered seeing in the Hizuru embassy.

There was a girl dressed in a black button up shirt with black pants behind the counter. She was busy counting the money they made for the day when Eren walked in.

The girl noticed Eren and made an X with her arms, probably implying that they were closed.

"Sorry, closed." She said, her accent so broken it was hard to understand her.

"I need to see your boss." Eren tried anyway.

"Boss?" The girl asked.

"The person who owns this place." Eren clarified.

The girl didn't fully understand but went into the back to get the owner of the restaurant. She looked at Eren suspiciously, which wasn't surprising since he had his hood up from his hoodie and his hair obscured his face.

Eren waited for a few minutes while the owner of the restaurant came out. He was an older man, maybe in his 40s with a large gut and glasses on his face. He wore a simple black suit with what Eren assumed was a nametag.

"I'm sorry, but we're closed." The man said.

"I'm told to give you a message." Eren said calmly, though it was somewhat forced since he was struggling to keep his emotions in check.

"A message?" The man asked, having a bit of fear go through him.

"You borrowed money and didn't pay it back." Eren said to the man.

"Look, I am just struggling with the payments." He said. "The business isn't doing as well as I thought it was, and my wife just got pregnant with our third child." He pleaded.

The man was clearly concerned and confused. Were the Yakuza employing foreigners now? Although the girl didn't understand, she could understand that her boss was scared of the suspicious man.

"I don't care." Eren hardened his heart at the man's plight. "I don't care if it's paid or not, I'm here to deliver a message." Eren stepped

closer.

The man stepped back in fear, terrified of what Eren would do to him. The girl also stepped back, scared of what would happen to her boss. She understood that this man was a threat.

The girl reached into her pocket to pull out a phone, likely to call the authorities. Eren pulled out his custom Marlian pistol and aimed it at the girl. The girl stopped in her tracks as she stared directly at the pistol. Eren had no intention of hurting the girl, but he knew he needed to prevent her from using her movable phone.

"Wait!" The man said, holding up his hands and stepping between Eren and the girl. "She's my daughter, please don't." He pleaded.

"I'm not in the mood for games." Eren said. "They want you to learn a lesson."

The man knew what this meant. They already threatened him, and now it was time to pay for his consequences. He knew Eren was going to hurt him bad.

"Please, just let my daughter leave." The man begged. "I don't want her to see it."

Eren felt terrible about the situation. Clearly this was a desperate man who needed money to keep his business working and keep his family fed. He was just an innocent man who's only mistake was borrowing money that he couldn't pay back.

Eren felt completely unlike himself. As desperate as he was for money, why was he doing the dirty work of some scumbag criminal? Why was he hurting an innocent man when he did nothing wrong?

Eren knew he was a devil. Even the worst human alive didn't have nearly as many dead people on their soul as Eren did. Eren killed so many innocent people in the worst ways possible. First his attack on Marley, which he used civilians as tools and killed them when he

attacked. Then when he led the coup against Paradis, which got some innocent soldiers in the crossfire. Finally, the rumbling, his own form of global genocide.

Every time he did, he kept moving forward. Fighting to earn his freedom and protect his island. He told himself that no matter what, he would fight and move forward.

Even when he got here, to this alien world, Eren kept moving forward. He kept fighting and hurting people because he had no other choice. He had to survive. He had to fight. Even if that means hurting a few innocent people, he would continue to fight for his freedom and his life.

But for a moment, his thoughts went back to earlier, when he lost himself against the man who attacked Ai. He felt no pity for a man who tried to murder a woman and her children, but all he could think about was her face when she looked at him.

That look, Ai on her knees, clutching her son in her arms and staring up at him in fear. Tears threatening to spill and her eyes wide in shock at what Eren did. Even if it was to save her, Eren couldn't help but think of her face in that way.

He knew he was a devil, the Devil of Paradis. But even then, to have someone like her terrified of him was a blow to his soul. How much of a devil he looked to her, a woman who was as innocent as they came.

Sure, Ai had a rough life. But abuse wasn't that big of a deal to Eren. She didn't see the harsh realities of this world. Didn't watch monsters devour her loved ones or wake up every day with another bunkmate gone because a mission went poorly. She didn't see the explosions and sheer lack of empathy as Eldians were ordered to charge to their death.

To see her kind and innocent face contorted to a face of fear and horror made Eren feel bad and guilty.

"Stay where you are." Eren said as he walked up to the man.

"W-wait." The man pleaded.

Eren grabbed the man's left hand and bent his pinky finger backwards, causing the man to scream out in pain. The finger was at an unnatural angle, but Eren felt the bone in the finger snap. It wouldn't take long for the injury to heal. He assumed that it was an injury that could be easily fixed without a doctor as long as it was splinted correctly.

The man held his hand, struggling not to scream out from the pain. His daughter covered her mouth to prevent any sound from coming out, tears beginning to show in her eyes. It was simple, but Eren felt like it got the message across.

"They only said break a bone, so I did." Eren said. "Pay them next time or they'll send someone worse than me." Eren turned away from them.

The father and daughter talked with each other, but Eren didn't understand them. He didn't much care what they said but he decided to just leave them.

At the door to the restaurant, standing just outside from the partially opened entryway, was Sergei, who watched Eren from the outside. Eren grew upset that Sergei was here, implying that the criminal was following him. Unlike the stalker, Eren was unable to notice Sergei following him, meaning the older man was much more subtle.

"A broken finger?" Sergei asked as Eren left the restaurant. "I think Yakuza boss intended you to do more than that."

"Like I care what he said." Eren told Sergei. "He asked for a broken bone, the man's finger is broken. End of job."

"There is something to say about willfully ignoring the spirit of an order." Sergei said.

"Did he tell you to follow me?" Eren asked.

"I don't work for Yakuza." Sergei said. "So no, I have no orders to follow you."

"Then why are you here?" Eren asked.

"I'm curious how you would do on job. So, I followed you for a bit. Even saw nasty thing that happened in apartment. Wondered why there was a man limping away with knife in chest." Sergei said. "You kind of failed job though, he won't be happy."

"Like I said, I don't care." Eren repeated.

Sergei sighed due to Eren's rash attitude. Sergei knew Eren was headstrong, but the kid was going to get himself or someone he cares about killed.

"Let me take you home." Sergei pointed over to his car.

"Fine." Eren said.

It was a short ride to his home, maybe ten minutes. Eren walked the entire way there at a faster pace, so it took him an hour to reach the restaurant. It wasn't a big deal for him, Eren was used to long marches while he was in the scouts and the Marlian Military.

"You know, I can tell you're not doing well in head." Sergei began.

"Is that right." Eren said, choosing to keep his focus out of the window.

"You killed stalker and hurt businessman. I'm wondering what is going on in head." Sergei tried again, Eren remained silent.

Sergei sighed again, noticing how fragile Eren was right now. The kid was clearly suffering and didn't let anyone into his life to help him.

"You know, I wondered how you would do in criminal life." Sergei began. "You're skilled, but still new to it. You still have lines you don't want to cross, but still do anyway." Sergei said.

"I crossed a lot of lines a long time ago." Eren said.

"During war, da?" Sergei asked, taking Eren by surprise. "I don't know what war you fought or what flag you fought for, but I can tell you have regrets."

"You don't know anything." Eren said.

"I know that you probably killed innocent people before, da?" Sergei guessed.

"Just shut up." Eren said angrily.

"Da, you did." Sergei said. "There's a line we Soldiers cross when we kill innocent people. We tell ourselves we do it for our motherland or for the people we care for in our lives. We tell ourselves it's unavoidable or that we have to kill innocent people to survive. Eventually, you cross that line so many times that the line starts to blur."

Eren took a deep breath, getting upset as Sergei continued to talk.

"Then you get to the world and find that there is still a fight to be had. With no family or country to fight for, we tell ourselves that we're desperate. We fight to survive and now we can't find a reason to cross that line anymore, but we've done it so much that we barely can recognize it anymore."

"Is there a point to this?" Eren asked. "Should I feel bad and be a hypocrite. Tell myself that after everything I've done that now I should feel bad about what I do?" Eren turned to face Sergei. "Do you think that changes what I did before?"

"I know you feel bad kid." Sergei said. "I know that you don't want to hurt innocent people. You want to live away from that, but circumstances prevent that."

"I don't need this from you Sergei." Eren said angrily. "You got me into this."

"I gave you opportunity to get off street. There is always choice." Sergei said. "You worked for me because of choice. Desperate, yes, but I offered job. You knew job was crime. I am a criminal, so of course I can only offer criminal job."

"So why should I feel bad now?" Eren countered.

"Do or don't, it doesn't matter what you do." Sergei said. "Hurt innocent people to survive, or don't and make life harder for yourself. That's the choice you have. You cross that line now because you decided that your life and freedom are more important than the life of an innocent person's. That above all else, your happiness and standard of living is more important."

"That advice coming from a criminal?" Eren countered.

"You're right." Sergei laughed. "I am criminal, so I won't judge your decision. All I'm telling you, is that you have to decide whether you want to prioritize your life, or your morals. Very few people can do both."

There was a silence that followed after Sergei spoke. Eren didn't care to think about the older man's words. Sergei said he was in a war, maybe he killed innocent people. Does it match anywhere close to the mountains of corpses that Eren trampled? How can anyone understand in this world? He could go through the history of this world and not find anyone a fraction as evil as Eren was.

"If you continue working for Yakuza, be prepared to do more jobs hurting innocent people." Sergei said. "Eventually, boss won't let you go."

As they pulled up, Eren got out of the car and shut the door, leaving Sergei alone. Sergei drove off after a moment and Eren was left alone in the parking lot. He noticed that the car that Ai's boss drove was in front of her apartment, meaning that there were people there. He also noticed that there were no guards or authority, so that must mean they weren't alerted.

Eren considered just leaving, but he was completely unable to do so unless he wanted to sleep on the streets tonight. He doubted Ai would want to see him again, so he decided he shouldn't try to speak to her anymore. Not like she would care much for a devil like him. If anything, she'd be better off. All Eren did for four years was hurt the people he loved, so it would spare her the pain if she didn't see him again. Especially if he was now involved in criminal activities.

Eren opened his door and placed his pistol on the table. He felt tired and annoyed after tonight's job and Sergei's philosophy lesson.

"I really am a devil." Eren said sadly as he sat down. "Sergei is right." Eren finally said.

Eren prioritized his own safety and standard of living over others in this world. He went to an innocent man who did desperate things for money in order to hurt him in front of his daughter. Eren was probably no better than those diseased dogs that kidnapped Mikasa all those years ago.

Eren's moveable phone vibrated, and he answered the call.

"What?" Eren asked.

"I told you to break bone." The boss said, not sounding very happy.

"I did what you said." Eren countered.

"I don't appreciate soft man who willfully ignored the meaning in my orders." The boss said.

"And I don't give a damn about some man who sends me to extort a defenseless and desperate man." Eren said angrily. "I understand I'm desperate, but I won't let that be a way for you to control me."

"Have I tried to control you boy?" The boss asked.

"Don't play games with me." Eren said. "You are manipulating me. Trying to get me to do whatever you want. You hold that desperation over me non-stop and I have no doubt that eventually you'll try to leverage me." Eren countered.

"Is that what you believe?" He asked.

"I'm not stupid." Eren said angrily. "And I'm tired of everyone in this damn place assuming I'm stupid. You want me to work for you, then I will. But if you send me after some desperate fool again then I won't hesitate to tell you to go to hell. Nor will I allow you to leverage me like some dog."

There was silence for a moment, but Eren made sure that the message was well understood. To hell with this man who used him for such a petty job.

"I'll allow that for now boy." The boss said. "Though watch what you say, you're becoming a lot less interesting to me now."

"I don't care." Eren said, though he doubted the boss heard since the boss hung up.

Eren tossed the phone on the table, feeling upset about the whole situation. Eren was no one's slave or pawn, and he refused to be one. He didn't care who he upset or if the boss would send people after him. Either he'll fight the Yakuza off or die. It was as simple as that.

Maybe it was hypocritical of him to draw a line on innocent lives now after everything he did in his world, but if Eren was a devil anyway,

they why not be a hypocrite as well? A devil is a hypocrite anyway, so why not?

He would do this his way and no one else's. The Yakuza were not the scouts or the MPs. They were not people that held power over him and if they decided to take their resources from him, then Eren would find another way to fight.

Eren looked at his clock and saw that it was nearly midnight. Eren felt exhausted from this entire day. First the day with Ai, then the attack, and now this damned job. His emotions today went all over the place multiple times that he felt like he was struggling to keep himself in check. He felt tired, sick, and had a massive headache.

Eren took his boots and shirt off and laid back on the bed, willing himself to sleep. With all the emotions from today, it was easy for him to fall asleep.

This was another fun one to write lol.

So, a few things I want to address, a lot of people mention about Eren finding a better job, such as Ai's bodyguard or something. Not only do I think that it'll be less interesting, but I also don't think it can happen in reality.

I've done security work before. Any job involving security usually involves a criminal background check and of course health insurance. Ichigo would have to not only provide Eren health insurance, but he'd have to declare Eren to the government since his pay would be taxable. Not only that, as a foreigner, the Japanese government would have to ensure that Eren is continuing to pay taxes to his country of origin, since you have to pay dual taxes if you work in a foreign country. Obviously, that won't happen lol.

I also highly doubt that Ichigo would pay Eren under the table either, since not only could that get Ichigo arrested but there's no way he

wouldn't at least run a background check with his idols safety on the line, even if he liked Eren (Which he doesn't lol).

That's really the crux of the problem. Every job requires you to submit some kind of identification number so you can receive income taxes. People who pay under the table typically offer either low paying jobs or illegal jobs.

That's honestly why he can't get a job. The digital age is just too robust for a protagonist from another world. He has to take illegal work because of taxes. Kind of funny that so many issues in an Iseki type story happen due to taxes lol.

Anyway, I hope that answers a lot of questions on why I did what I did. Not only that, but I also personally find this more interesting than if he was just Ai's bodyguard. While I have no issues with stories like that, it is a bit of a trope by now. A good trope, but a trope all the same. Plus, I feel like it takes the agency out of the relationship. As her bodyguard, it forces them to be together instead of having to work for it. Plus, as the story goes on, the criminal side of Eren will start causing problems for not only himself, but people close to him.

Anyway, hope this is a good aftermath chapter. Try to go easy on Ichigo, he's basically a concerned father lol. It also calls Eren out on being a hypocrite so now he basically decides where he stands on certain issues.

I Refuse to Leave Eren Alone

Chapter 13: I Refuse to Leave Eren Alone

After last night's attack and the long conversation with President Saitou, Ai spent most of the day with her children and the President. Miyako made delicious breakfast for everyone, a skill she got better in the past four years since she never cared much for cooking prior to helping Ai with the kids.

Ai made sure to maintain her motherly persona as much as possible, refusing to let the emotions from last night get to her while her children were near her. They needed to see that she was strong and in control of her emotions so that they could feel safe and secure in the house.

Ai's biggest fear was that they wouldn't feel safe anymore. Their home was meant to be seen as completely safe since they always had to hide when they went out into the public. She didn't want them to lose the feeling of safety that their home should give them.

After breakfast, Ai put on an anime show that Ruby would occasionally watch. She made sure it was age appropriate of course, but it was a magical girl anime, so Ai was confident that it was child friendly. Aqua wasn't very interested in it, but she kind of guessed since he was a boy and he showed that he was interested in boy things.

Though, it was always strange since he actually always preferred shows and books that you'd expect a grown man to like. Ai wondered if maybe he was just so much more mature for his age, or maybe he has an older soul like how a lot of older mythologies speak on reincarnation. Not that Ai ever believed in reincarnation.

At least he was safe, she would tell herself. The bruising on his neck was still very visible, but he had no issues in swallowing food or moving his neck. She'd notice him wince a few times, but he had full range of motion in his neck.

Ai wanted to go over to Eren's door and see if he was ok. He left without saying anything and Ai wondered if he was upset about what happened. She wasn't surprised. He was terrifying when he... hurt... Ryosuke. She didn't want to imagine what happened to him, she felt as if he didn't deserve it.

Maybe arrested, but not killed. Ai hated the thought of violence of any kind. It always brought up memories of her mother. But she also understood that even if he went too far, Eren defended them. How can she hate or even distrust him when he put his life on the line to protect her and her children?

Eren also seemed sad about what happened. If he was sad about what happened, it meant he was a good person, right? He seemed like he was strong, and adrenaline can do weird things to a person. So, he must be incredibly sad about killing someone.

She made up her mind. While Miyako and President Saitou weren't looking, she would step outside in order to knock on his door and invite him over. Eren didn't deserve to be left alone if he was going through the same emotions that she was. He needed to be around people and have his mind calmed. It would also give Miyako and the President the chance to see the real him.

While everyone was distracted, Ai put on a pair of slip-on shoes. She checked herself in the mirror really quick. She got a chance to bathe after breakfast and changed into a white shirt with yoga pants. She took a second to smooth out her hair before silently opening the door.

She stepped over to Eren's door and gave it a few knocks. She wondered if he was resting or even if he was home. She was a bit

worried about waking him up, but she didn't want Eren to be alone right now.

"What is it?" Eren said as he opened the door, shocked for a moment when he saw Ai. "Ai?" Eren asked.

Eren was not expecting to see her. He honestly thought that Ai didn't want to see him right now, given what happened last night. He especially didn't expect to see her smiling and happy face when he opened the door, though he could tell she was doing that idol act of hers.

"Hey sleepy head." Ai greeted, laughing a bit at how messed up his hair was. He must have been woken up when she knocked.

"What are you doing here?" Eren asked.

"Well, I figured you probably have a lot on your mind since last night." She said. "I figured you could use some company, so my door is open for you to come over."

Eren raised an eyebrow. Given how scared she was of him last night, Eren expected her to be worried about him. However, Ai acted as if last night didn't even happen.

"I'll be fine." Eren dismissed, not interested in socializing with anyone right now.

"Oh come on." Ai pushed. "It's not healthy to just shut yourself off from the world after something like last night."

"I just want to be alone." Eren said.

"I know." Ai said. "I do sometimes too, but it's not good for the mind to just be alone and away from friends."

"We're friends now?" Eren asked dismissively.

"Well, I'm your friend at least." She said. "So, I have an invested interest in your wellbeing, so I'm not giving you any other choice but to come over for some delicious lunch." She flashed a peace sign while winking.

Eren sighed in annoyance. He almost would have preferred it if she didn't want to even see him again. Instead, here she was, once again forcing him out of his room.

"I didn't think you'd trust me after what happened." Eren said honestly.

"It was scary, that much is true." Ai agreed.

Ai was scared. Eren seemed like a rabid animal when he attacked Ryosuke, like something you'd hear about animal control having to put down. However, regardless of how scary it was, and how much it implied that he may have killed before, Ai couldn't look past the fact that he did protect her.

"But you saved my life." She said. "If you weren't there, I honestly don't even want to imagine what would happen."

"You looked very scared at the time." Eren said.

"Well, yea." Ai agreed. "It was kind of the first time that happened to me. I never actually was in a situation where someone tried to kill me. So, I was very scared. Especially when Aqua had a knife near his throat."

"He did?" Eren asked.

"Right, you weren't there for that part." Ai said. Eren must have come in shortly after Aqua escaped Ryosuke's grasp. "Aqua bit his hand and he dropped him. Aqua still has a bruise on his neck from where he was... you know... strangled." She struggled to say.

"Yea, I didn't see that part." Eren said.

"So, yea, I was scared. Scared for myself, scared for my children, and honestly I was scared for you." She admitted.

"Me?" Eren asked.

"Ryosuke attacked me because he was mad at me." Ai said. "I was his target. I didn't want you to get hurt at all. You were defenseless and he had a knife. I didn't think you'd be able to fight him off."

"I'm hardly defenseless." Eren said. "The fool didn't even know how to use a knife."

"Yea, please don't say stuff like that around anyone else." Ai said, once again silencing the alarm bells in her head.

"It's the truth." Eren said.

"But the thing is, I was scared that he'd hurt you. So, if I could have bargained with him to let you escape with my kids, then I'd feel much better."

"Even at the cost of your own life." Eren said.

"Well, I'm a mama. It's my job." Ai smiled.

Ai reminded Eren nothing of his own mother. She looked nothing like his mother, nor did she act like his mother. But for a moment, he drew a few similarities from her. Both her and his own mother were women willing to give their lives if it meant the safety of their children. For Carla Yeager, she did give her life. For Ai, she was lucky that Eren was there to do what Hannes could not. Though to be fair, no one was prepared for that day.

"How do you think Aqua and Ruby would have felt?" Eren asked.

"Huh?" Ai asked. "What do you mean?"

"How do you think they would have felt, watching their mother die while a man carried them away to safety?"

"I-" Ai struggled to answer.

"They would have been devastated. They would have felt nothing but anger and rage at the world. They would have grown vengeful. If the man left, they would have dedicated their lives to finding the murderer and ending him. You'd save their lives but doom them to a cruel life of vengeance and hatred." Eren said.

Ai was stunned into silence as he said that. She didn't imagine what would have happened if she did die to Ryosuke and the last time her children would see her alive was running away with a strange man to safety while she died. She was so caught up in trying to preserve their lives, that she didn't consider that they would grow to be angry and hurt.

"Is that coming from experience?" Ai asked sadly.

Eren said nothing, confirming her question. She knew his mother was killed, which means that Eren likely saw his mother's murder. He said it happened when he was ten, meaning he'd probably vividly remember it.

Ai's heart broke when she imagined it. In her mind, she imagined a woman who had similar features to Eren, in much the same position she was in last night. cornered by a killer and pleading for her son to be spared. She imagined someone carrying Eren away as his mother was stabbed, imagined a small ten-year-old Eren crying as he saw his own mothers death.

And that's what almost happened to her, what almost happened to Ruby and Aqua. She looked Eren in the eyes and saw what Meimei meant when he reminded her of her ex. There was a darkness in his eyes, a kind of dark spark that told of a cruel and painful life. Eye's that wanted to see the world burn.

Even though her ex and Eren were polar opposites in how they acted, that same anger was there. However, Eren's eyes told more

of pain than anger. Whatever anger that was there was fading, replaced with sorrow and a sense of loss.

She imagined Aqua having those same eyes. That anger and pain that Eren and her ex both had. What would have happened to him if she died? He already was a serious boy; would he go down whatever road Eren did? Would he have had those same thoughts that Eren has now? It broke her heart to imagine her sweet and innocent boy possessing those same eyes.

"Well, it didn't happen because you saved me." Ai tried to smile, hoping to keep her loving attitude so as to keep Eren from thinking about the past too much.

"I guess so." Eren dismissed.

"Which is why you're coming over now." Ai said with determination.

"Why?" Eren asked.

"Because you're too serious all the time. You need to laugh more." She smiled. "So, let's not think about what happened, either in the distant past or what happened last night. Instead, let's have a delicious lunch and talk about better things."

"I really don't want to." Eren said.

"No, but you need to." Ai countered. "Besides, I don't think you saw the inside of my home yet."

"I did last night." Eren said.

"Ok, but I don't think you were admiring my decorations." She said in a deadpanned voice.

"Fair." Eren shrugged.

"Come on, let's just go." Ai grabbed Eren's hand and started to pull him away.

"Wait, can I at least put something on my feet?" Eren asked, giving a bit of resistance.

"Oh right." Ai laughed, noticing that he was barefoot. "Sorry, go ahead."

Ai expected him to put on some kind of flip flop since they were next to each other, but he went through the trouble of putting on boots. Did he only have that one pair of boots? She would need to get him some more things if he was going to be living there.

" *Ai?* " She heard from her room, only to see Miyako-San poking her head out.

When she saw Ai outside of Eren's room, her jaw almost hit the floor.

" *Are you serious?* " She asked, clearly annoyed. " *You can't even wait for Ichigo and I to leave before going to see him? You know how Ichigo gets.* "

" *How do I get?* " The President walked out with his wife.

He looked at his wife as she scolded Ai, then towards his best idol, who was next to Eren's open door.

" *Seriously?* " He asked.

" *Well, I didn't want Eren to be alone after last night.* " Ai shrugged, knowing that this was going to happen eventually.

" *You couldn't have waited for us to leave?* " The President said in annoyance.

" *See?* " Miyako pointed to her husband.

" *Well, he was all alone, and you guys said you were going to stay here till late. So, I thought of inviting him over for lunch.* " Ai explained.

"What's going on?" Eren asked as he stepped outside of the house.

" *Oh yea, Eren, you remember President Saitou and Miyako-San.* " Ai pointed to her boss.

Eren stared at her, waiting for Ai to realize her mistake again.

" *Nani?* " Ai asked.

"I'm assuming that's a question?" Eren asked.

" *Oh, right.* " Ai hit herself. "Look, it's hard trying to switch back and forth when you know two languages. Sometimes I forget which one I'm speaking."

"I wouldn't know." Eren shrugged. The only people he ever met that knew more than one language were Hizuru.

"Well, until you try to learn more than one, then you can judge me." Ai crossed her arms in a joking manner, pretending to be offended.

However, Ai couldn't contain her composure as she started to giggle from the joke. Eren, although still didn't like her idol act, did find the interaction a bit amusing.

"I doubt I'd have trouble switching back and forth like you do." Eren laughed.

"Oh?" Ai shot back. "Well, why don't you learn Japanese and we'll see how easy it is for you."

Miyako and Ichigo watched the little interaction, knowing full well Ai had a crush on the young man. Worse yet, Eren had a smile now for the first time they've seen him. It was small and subtle, but there.

" *They're bantering.* " Miyako said.

" *I know.* " Ichigo sighed, worried about Ai's lack of common sense and annoyed at how easily she just waves off red flags.

"Come on in." Ai grabbed Eren's hand and dragged him into her home, right behind Miyako and the President.

She stopped in the doorway and quickly took off her slipped on shoes. She started walking into the main room before turning around and looking surprised at Eren.

"Hey, what are you doing?" She asked.

"Coming in?" Eren said in an unsure tone.

"With your boots on?" Ai asked.

"Yes?" Eren answered, still unsure.

Ai looked at him as if she was scolding one of her children, like Eren just did something that would deserve a light punishment from his mother.

"In a Japanese house, you leave your shoes at the door." Ai said.
"It's polite."

"Oh, sorry." Eren said.

"It's ok." Ai giggled, slightly amused at Eren's behavior. "Normally I'd make you clean the floor, but since this is your second time I'll make an exception."

"Second time?" Eren asked.

"Well, yea. Yesterday." She joked.

"I don't think that counts." Eren said in annoyance.

"It does." Ai giggled, hoping to keep the mood light.

Eren sighed but smiled a bit again. She was a very strange girl. He almost found her strangeness to be appealing in a way. She would

always just try to look at the bright side of things and go as far as to make light of bad things so as not to let anyone dwell on it.

"Miyako-San has prepared a delicious meal of us for lunch." Ai smiled.

"What is it?" Eren looked over towards the older woman.

"It's Budae-jjigae, it's a Korean dish that roughly translates to Army Base Stew." Miyako explained.

"Korean food is typically spicier than Japanese, but so delicious." Ai said.

"What is Army Base Stew?" Eren asked.

"It's a special kind of stew that has a lot of Asian and American foods boiled together. Like Spam, Hot Dogs, American Cheese, and Ramen noodles." She explained. "During the Korean War, a lot of Korean people settled around American Bases and combined American and Korean foods. Now-a-days, it's seen as a delicacy."

Eren kept quiet about asking about this war she was talking about. If he was alone with Ai he'd ask, but the others in the room already distrusted him so he kept quiet.

Eren sat down with everyone else at the small table. It was difficult for him to find a comfortable position since he was used to eating on chairs his whole life. Eren did on occasion eat on the ground on mission or during the Mid East campaign, but he still wasn't used to this weird small table.

Eren sat on the edge closest to the wall, with Ai opposite of him. Her children were on either side of her. Miyako and the President sat on the other sides of the table, both opposite of each other.

Eren saw as Ruby, Ai's daughter, whispered something into her mother's ear. Ai had a questioning look as she listened to her

daughter, then gave a heartwarming smile when she was done.

"Ruby-Chan wanted to thank you for last night." Ai said.

"It's no problem." Eren waived off the gratitude from the small child.

"What about you Aqua-Chan, is there anything you want to say?"
She turned to her son, who was slurping up a large bundle of noodles.

After he swallowed, Aqua turned towards his mother before looking at Eren. He looked directly at Eren and said something in Japanese, then looked to his mother to translate for him.

"Aqua-Chan says he is incredibly grateful and glad you saved us." Ai smiled.

Aside from the children, everyone began speaking to each other in English so as to include Eren in any conversations. Predictably, Eren only answered simple questions and didn't contribute much of the conversation. It was mainly Ai talking about various things that happened that week, such as how tiring it was being in the meet the idol room when so many people would come through.

"Sorry to make it so difficult for you." Eren laughed a bit, not knowing based on her demeanor that day that she was exhausted.

"You were just one person in the line, hardly added any time." Ai giggled.

"You didn't look tired at all." Eren said.

"Well, I have to keep up appearances." Ai said. "Even though I got done a performance, I had to make sure that every fan has the right to see me at my best. After all, I see thousands of fans in an event, that'll be their first time seeing me. So, I need to always be perfect."

"You did take a while getting there." Eren said.

"Yea, I had to go back to redo my makeup and hair." She said.

"Really?" Eren asked.

"You can sweat a lot doing those shows and sometimes it can ruin the makeup. So, our stylists had to reapply it and fix my hair. Otherwise, I'd look like I'd just got out of bed." She giggled.

"Sometimes fans can get upset if an idol doesn't match their exact fantasies of them." Ichigo commented.

"I still don't get why they get upset." Eren said. "Everyone knows it's fake, right"

"Not everyone." Ichigo said. "A lot of people can be psychotic in their obsession. Like the guy from last night."

"Wait." Eren stopped him. "That man was a fan?"

"Yes." Ichigo answered.

"And he tried to kill Ai?" Eren asked.

"Unfortunately, yes." Ichigo answered again.

"That makes no sense." Eren said. "Why kill someone you like?"

"He felt betrayed that Ai had children." Ichigo said. "It's one of the reasons we go to such lengths to hide her identity, and why were so cautious around you." Ichigo answered honestly.

"That explains why you acted so weird around me." Eren said to himself. "Wait." Eren said. "He felt betrayed she had kids? Was he an ex-lover or something?"

"That's a strange way of putting it." Ichigo said, noticing how he said ex-lover. "But no, to my knowledge that was the first time they met." Ichigo turned to Ai.

"He did a meet the idol event a while back and gave me a present. But that was it." Ai said, not bothering to look at the trash where his present now was.

Ai threw it away the moment she had a chance to do so. It hurt to think about the poor man who let his obsession overcome him, that she didn't want to look at it again.

"But that makes no sense." Eren said. "How can he feel betrayed that you had kids when he didn't even know you?" Eren asked Ai.

"Well, it's my fault." Ai said sadly.

"Ai-" Ichigo said.

"It is." She said. "I created this lie and told all my fans I loved them, even when it's a lie. He probably wouldn't have done what he did if I didn't lie the way I did. If I was honest, maybe-"

"Bullshit!" Eren slammed his hand down on the table, causing Ai and Ruby to jump at the surprise while The President, Aqua, and Miyako widened their eyes at the display.

"Eren-" Ai tried to say.

"To hell with that bastard." Eren said angrily. "He tried to take a woman from her children out of his own selfish desires. He's nothing more than a rabid dog. How can you feel bad for him when you had every right to do what you did." Eren said to her.

"Because I-" She was cut off again.

"You're better than that Ai." He said. "It's a damn act that you do to make money and support yourself. He's some psychotic bastard that couldn't see that and had no right to attack you."

Ai was left speechless as Eren defended her. Even Miyako and the President were speechless. They ever imagined that Eren would defend her so much after hearing what he did.

Aqua was glad he heard Eren say those things. As much as he still wasn't sure about Eren's past, he was glad that Eren was at least normal in that regard. Knowing the difference between enjoying a cute idol and her act versus getting obsessed to the point of violence.

Ruby just looked around the table, completely unsure of what was going on due to her lack of English.

"Thank you Eren." Ai said with a smile. "I'm glad you said that."

Aqua knew that Ai was always hard on herself and had her own insecurities, but it was nice to see her hear the words from someone that wasn't either her children or her boss.

"So, he got bit by a bug, and now he has spider powers?" Eren asked as they watched a superhero movie.

"I think so." Ai said as they watched.

"Of course. Haven't you been watching?" Ichigo said in annoyance as they watched the movie. "Just pay attention."

Aqua wanted to watch another western superhero movie, so Ai decided to have a little afternoon movie time with everyone. Eren was very surprised at how amazing the quality looked. It looked even more real than the modern pictures he saw in his world. He sat on one of the chairs while Ai sat on the couch with her kids on each side. Miyako decided to do all the cleaning while the President worked on his computer on the table, though he did keep his attention partially on the movie.

The plot was simple, and thankfully it was in English with Japanese letters on the bottom for the ones who can't speak English, mainly Ai's children. It was odd, but in hindsight it wasn't too crazy compared to his own powers.

"Hey, Eren." Ai called over in a bit of a whisper.

"What?" He asked, turning to her.

"Ruby-Chan said your hair is a bit of a mess." She said.

"Ok?" Eren said.

"She wanted to know if she could fix it for you." Ai said.

Eren looked at the little girl as she sat next to her mother. She had a worried but determined expression on her face when Ai asked that.

"Sure, I guess." Eren said, seeing no reason why he couldn't let the four-year-old mess with his hair.

"Let me go get my brush." Ai said as she stood up and went over to her room.

After a moment, she returned with a brush and some hair ties before handing it to her daughter. Ruby looked excited at getting to mess with Eren's hair.

"She actually does her side ponytail herself sometimes." Ai said.

"Well, please don't give me that." Eren said, causing Ai to giggle.

"No, I mean she's very good with styling hair. She does it every chance she can get." Ai explained.

Eren sat at the floor in front of where Ruby sat on the couch. Ruby took the brush and started lightly brushing Eren's hair, removing the few nots that was in his straight hair. Eren didn't feel all that comfortable letting her mess with his hair, but he figured it would be fun for the kid, so he let her work on him.

Ruby eventually managed to get his hair straight enough and decided to pull it back so that his hair on his scalp was almost flush with his head. She took a hair tire and tied hit into a tight ponytail that

was low on his head. Then Ruby started the braid the ponytail before tying it off at the bottom, creating a single long braid on the back of his head.

" *It looks amazing Ruby-Chan!* " Ai screamed at her daughter. "Take a look Eren." She said, handing him a mirror.

Eren took the mirror and looked at himself. It looked ok, but Eren never had his hair styled like this before. It was weird for him, but it looked ok. He wondered if this was a girls type of hairstyle since he wasn't familiar with Japanese hairstyles. Even his improvised bun didn't make his hair that flush on his head.

Ai laughed with her daughter in a very loving way as she commented on Eren's new hairdo. Eren had no intention of keeping it this way, but he'd at least let them have this for now.

As he saw the mother on the couch with her children, he couldn't help but see his own family in their place.

He saw his own mother as she laughed along with his dumb antics, always keeping that loving personality of hers even when she was sad. He saw a bit of himself in Aqua, never really showing her love or affection because of his own pathetic and childish pride. Mikasa, although nothing like Ruby, still acted like a kind of considerate daughter when she was adopted by the Yeager's.

If Eren wasn't here last night, this loving family wouldn't be here. Best case scenario, the children lived while the mother died. He had no doubt that Aqua would follow a similar path to him and grow angry and vengeful against the world. Ruby would no doubt grow that way as well, probably following in her brothers footsteps as he chose a life of vengeance and violence to avenge his mother.

At least Eren spared a family from going through what he went through. That was one thing that made him glad. Ai would stay safe to raise her children and show them all the love and affection that

Eren was robbed. They would grow to maybe follow in her footsteps or maybe do something else with their lives.

The only thing missing from their lives was a father, which Eren was unsure of why exactly he wasn't here.

"Hey Ai." Eren got her attention.

"Yes?" Ai asked, calming down from her play session with Ruby.

"Did you have a husband?" Eren asked.

He remembered Sergei saying she was single and could guess that whoever got her pregnant was no longer around. He was unsure if Ai had a husband who died.

Ai though... didn't take it like that.

"W-what?" She flushed. "I- uh..."

Ai wondered if Eren was asking if she was single. After all, if he brought up any relationship with a man in her life, maybe he wanted to know so he could ask her out.

Of course, though, Ai would never entertain the notion. After all, she was so busy with her work, and she had her kids who took up most of her free time. She could barely get any time to herself, let alone go out on dates. So it was impossible for her to even consider that Eren may be asking if she was single. She couldn't ever date him in a million years until she became rich and was able to afford the time to go out on a date with him and hopefully actually have the time-

"Ai?" Eren asked.

"Oh no, I have never been married." Ai blushed.

"I see." Eren said.

"Hey, we should do something next weekend." Ai said.

"Do what?" Eren asked.

"We should just do something this Saturday. It'll be my day off and we can go out and have fun. What do you say?" She asked.

"Will you force me to go regardless?" Eren asked.

"Yup!" Ai flashed a peace sign at him.

Eren put his head into his hand, clearly unable to escape the small womans grasp.

"Fine." Eren relented. "Where will you drag me this time?" He asked.

"Well, anywhere you want to go?" She asked him.

Eren thought for a moment. When was the last time he saw the Sea? It was always his favorite place to go when they had to go to the docks after they reclaimed wall Maria. He actually missed it a lot while being here, and he wondered just how big and beautiful the Sea was in this world. He wondered if it was the same salty water from his world or maybe the Sea was fresh in this world.

"How about the Sea." Eren recommended.

"The Sea?" Ai asked. "You mean the beach?"

"Sure." Eren said, actually kind of excited about seeing this worlds version of the Sea.

Ai on the other hand, interpreted it differently.

She remembered the picture she signed for him after the concert. It was when she did that modeling job for a swimsuit company. It was the most revealing she ever was in the public image and the thought of him looking at that picture filled her with a sense of embarressment but also a bit of pride.

And he wanted to go to a beach, where she would be in a swimsuit, in the flesh, in real life, in front of him, and basically mostly naked.

"You ok?" Eren asked.

"Y-yea. That sounds great." Ai smiled, hiding her blush at the thought.

Ichigo was wondering why Ai was struggling to talk to Eren. After all, it was just a beach. What is so scary about that? Of course, that meant a headache for him because he knew Ai was going to request it, meaning he would have to rent out a private spot since he didn't want her spotted with a strange man. He already knew he was going to need to organize everything for Ai and request production to allow "Recreational Funding" to purchase the private spot, so he'd probably have to invite all the girls on this trip.

Miyako only shook her head. She remembered going to the beach with guys, mainly as an excuse to show off her swimsuit for the boy so she'd have an easier time getting his attention. No doubt Ai was thinking the same. She could tell her dense blockhead of a husband couldn't figure that out. He never did fully understand a woman's heart.

Aqua thought this would be a perfect opportunity for them to get close. It would ensure at least a friendship, though he could tell that Ai was getting nervous. He figured that it would be good for Ai, not only for her safety, but also to spend a fun day with someone her own age. He still just wished Eren had less red flags.

Ruby had no idea what was going on.

"I'll make sure President Saitou sets everything up." Ai smiled.

And there it is, Ichigo thought.

"We'll make it really fun. Though you have to promise to bring sunscreen." Ai told Eren.

"Sunscreen?" He asked on habit.

"Yea, it's a lotion that protects your skin from the sun." Ai said automatically, already used to Eren's lack of general knowledge.

' *How uneducated is this guy!?* ' Aqua, Miyako, and Ichigo thought.

I'm actually a little unsure of this chapter honestly. I wanted to avoid the trope of "Bad thing happen, so characters don't talk to each other for a while", and instead make it something a bit more wholesome and funnier. Let me know if this actually ended up working lol.

What Swimsuit Would Eren Lik

Chapter 14: What Swimsuit Would Eren Like?

Ai hadn't seen Eren in the past few days. She was so busy with her rehearsals that she rarely found the time to go visit him. Even when she did try to knock on his door, Eren wouldn't open it, probably because he wasn't home. He did have a job at a moving company, so Ai wasn't too concerned about that. Still, she did wish she found time to invite him over to either a rehearsal or to get some food.

Of course, President Saitou made it clear that he is not allowed to come to any rehearsal, since he was still very untrusting of Eren. It still annoyed Ai, but she understood his reasoning. After all, as much as she thought of the President as almost a father figure in her life, he was still her boss and had a business to run. He couldn't afford his idols getting distracted because of a guy and potentially lowering their productivity.

Although, he did let her kids come over on occasion, which always brought a smile to their face since they got to watch mama practice her dancing and singing.

At first, the girls all made sure Ai and the children were ok. It was a huge scare for them to learn that Ai was almost killed by a stalker and that Aqua had a knife to his throat. Ai requested that they don't bring that up to him because she was worried that he might be having issues dealing with the event. Each girl promised that not a word would be said around the kids.

Ai did mention that Eren was the one to save her, and after what the girls saw on the news, made them get worried a bit more about him. However, they gossiped with her and told her that maybe he was a decent man after all. He did risk his own life and safety to protect the young mother and her kids, so he must be a half decent person.

The girls still didn't fully trust him, but they agreed to at least give him a chance since he did save her life. It was the very least they could do.

"You did great mama!" Ruby yelled excitedly.

"Thanks Ruby-Chan." Ai smiled at her daughter, who was sitting on the side of the dance room.

"You guys are doing so good at being patient." Meimei said sweetly towards the kids.

"Yea, they're so well behaved." Nino agreed.

Aqua kind of shrugged at the compliment. It wasn't hard to just sit in one spot, especially when he got to enjoy his favorite idol doing her dance practice. Ai really was amazing and talented, even in practice. She gave her heart and soul to each and every rehearsal and it translated so well into her performances.

However, he needed to find a way to ensure Eren remained near Ai in order to protect her. It wasn't going to be easy; he knew that for a fact. Eren wasn't dense, at least Aqua didn't think so, but he showed no interest in Ai. He was respectful and showed that he at least enjoys her company, but he needed to find some way to get Eren invested more in Ai. Either as a good friend, or even as a romantic partner.

Aqua really couldn't care less if Ai got a broken heart if it did go romantic and ended. He'd rather her have a broken heart than dying due to some maniac. He just needed to ensure Eren stayed with Ai long enough until he found a way to deal with his father.

But his options were limited. Aqua knew fairly well what men were into, after all, he did have some relationships in the past. He remembered having a few ex-girlfriends who he enjoyed spending time with. Of course, it never progressed into full commitment due to

his own studies, but he was confident that he knew how to make a relationship work.

Ai though...

"So, you're bringing tall, dark, and exotic to the beach?" Meimei smiled.

"W-well, y-yea. He said he l-loved the beach." Ai stuttered.

"Oh, come on, he's trying to get you in a swimsuit." Nino laughed.

"Maybe he'll be expecting a little reward for saving his princess in distress?" Meimei said suggestively.

"N-no!" Ai yelled back in embarrassment. "It's just the beach, everyone goes to the beach. He probably likes it."

Ai only had one short term relationship, Aqua remembered. A relationship that likely involved manipulation and possibly emotional abuse. Not to mention, her ex was also the guy trying to get her killed. So, in terms of total dating experience, Ai had none. She also seemed very nervous and Aqua was worried that it would impact how she acted around Eren in a romantic sense.

One issue Ai had was her lack of options when it came to dating. Sure, anyone would gladly go on a date with her in a heartbeat, but in terms of actually going on a date she had no options. Which meant she was even more nervous with Eren since she probably felt that this was her one and only chance for romance. It's a common thing in people, where the more options you have in partners, the more confident and self-assured you are.

However, with less options, you feel much more afraid and nervous than you otherwise would. Even a minor rejection would hurt Ai. In fact, it did hurt her, which is why she refused to take those rejections and basically force Eren to be with her. It was cute, but also showed

how scared Ai was to get rejected by what she feels is her one chance for some kind of romantic relationship.

So, in order to get Ai and Eren to form some kind of bond, she would need to try to actually pursue him romantically. That would mean flirting, dates, and even seducing. But Ai was so completely hopeless when it came to that. She was a bit of a ditz and didn't have too much common sense.

However, she could always try the tried-and-true method of being in a nice bikini.

"Hey Ai." Aqua got her attention.

"What is it Aqua-Chan?" Ai asked, glad to have the conversation shifted.

"I don't think we have any swimsuits." He said.

"You don't have swimsuits?" Meimei asked.

"Uh... no?" Ai confirmed.

"You're planning to go to the beach with a guy and you don't have a swimsuit ready?" Meimei stressed.

"We really didn't need one since we never really go out." Ai said.

"We did a swimsuit modeling job a year ago, didn't you keep the swimsuit?" She asked.

"No, I didn't see a need to keep it." Ai said.

"Well, we're going to pick one out for you before we go." Meimei said.

"That does make sense." Ai said.

Did she really not even remember to get a swimsuit? This is why she's hopeless and Aqua needs to help her. What was her plan?

"What were you going to do if you didn't get a swimsuit?" Meimei asked.

"Well, I have some cute dresses." Ai said.

Yup, she's doomed.

"After rehearsal, we're getting you and the kid's swimsuits." Meimei said.

"Wouldn't that be a bad idea since we could get spotted?" Ai asked.

"That's why it'll just be us two and the kids. We can also get a private changing room so we can try them on." Meimei planned.

"Ok, no problem. I'll get something cute." Ai said.

"No." Meimei said.

"No?" Ai asked.

"We're getting you something a little more, sexy." Meimei specified.

"Eh..." Ai stuttered in worry.

"Yup, soon we'll get Eren completely in love with you after this date." Meimei said.

"I-it's not a date!" Ai denied.

"Sure, so he decided the beach so he can look at the pretty waves?" Meimei said in disbelief. "He just wants to see you in a bikini."

"B-but, I've never worn a bikini before." Ai said.

"Which is why he'll be the only man who has seen you in such an etchi way." Meimei smiled. "I mean... besides- you know what, never mind." Meimei cut herself off. "It'll still be romantic."

Ai and Meimei were dressed in their typical disguises, mainly their sunglasses and hats. Since air quality was in acceptable levels today, they couldn't risk wearing masks and draw attention to themselves.

Ruby and Aqua walked on either side of Ai, each kid holding a hand as they walked so they wouldn't get lost. Not that aqua needed her to babysit him since he actually felt like Ai would be the one to get lost if anything. He truly did care for Ai, but sometimes she was just hopeless.

"You go over to the changing room; I'll get you some swimsuits to try on." Meimei said, pointing to the single room that was labeled as a solo and private changing room.

"Sure, just please don't get anything crazy." Ai begged.

"No promises." Meimei winked at her coworker while flashing a peace sign and sticking her own tongue out.

While Meimei wasn't as cute as Ai, Aqua still admitted that she was very beautiful. If Ai was not around, Meimei would undoubtedly be the main face of B-Komachi. However, he didn't think B-Komachi would have gotten this far without Ai.

The private room was a small little waiting area with a single door separating the waiting area to the actual changing area. It ensured that guests could have privacy, though most people use it when trying on more revealing clothes. Swimsuits were common things that people would use in these rooms, but it gave Ai and Meimei a perfect place to not get recognized.

Ai sat down and Ruby immediately jumped into her lap.

"Easy Ruby-Chan." Ai laughed at her daughter's display.

"Why mama?" She asked.

"You're getting so big that it's hard to have you in my lap all the time now." Ai smiled at her.

"I'm getting big?" Ruby asked in a slightly hurt tone.

"Only taller." Ai laughed at her daughter's offense. "But you're getting cuter every day." Ai said, kissing Ruby on the cheek.

Ruby hugged Ai, which Ai noticed she has been doing a lot lately. She seemed so much more physically affectionate lately compared to before, which Miyako guessed was from the scare they had from Ryosuke. Ai felt sad at that but was glad her daughter was still able to hold her and feel a mother's warmth and safety. Ai hugged her daughter back, so grateful that she was still here to hug her.

"Mama." Ruby said in a more serious tone.

"What is it Ruby-Chan?" Ai asked.

"Why were we attacked?" Ruby asked.

"What do you mean?" Ai wanted her to clarify.

"I know he was a fan, and you always talk about how dangerous it is." Ruby began. "But why did he attack us, I just still don't get it."

Ai wasn't sure how she could answer that. Ruby was so young that she doubted she fully understood what was going on. How do you explain the concepts of stalking, sexual assault, murder, and obsession to a child as young as her? She didn't even know how she was going to phrase it in a kid friendly way.

"He was a stalker, Ruby." Aqua answered for her.

"Yea, but why?" She asked, turning to face him.

"He was a poor fool who couldn't even get a girlfriend. Who probably based his whole life around an idol and wanted to have Ai all to himself." Aqua explained.

He actually explained it better than Ai could have, but how could Aqua be so smart and know that. He's a child.

"Aqua, how do you know about that?" Ai asked her son.

"It's obvious Ai." He said, a hint of anger in his voice.

Obvious? Was it really? She knew her kids were aware of their secret lifestyle, but how had he learned about the darker side of being an idol at such a young age? She knew for a fact that the President, Miyako, and the other girls didn't say a word to him.

The again, he always was reading adult things online, like the news and social media. He always looked up bad things when he was young. He would say he wanted to know more about what's going on in the world, but she never imagined that he'd be smart enough to learn about the dark sides of the entertainment industry.

It broke her heart to hear him say those things.

"So that's why?" Ruby asked. "He's some loser who couldn't get a girlfriend and because of that, mama almost had to die?"

"No Ruby." Ai said. "Remember what I told you? You can never be mean to fans, no matter what.

"But he tried to kill you mama!" Ruby argued.

"You're right, he did. And he was sick." Ai said, holding Ruby closer to her. "He didn't fully know what he was doing and needed help. Help that only a doctor can provide. Unfortunately, he didn't get that help."

"It doesn't make it right Ai." Aqua countered.

"It doesn't matter Aqua-Chan." Ai said. "We can't be mean to people or make assumptions about them. Ryosuke was sick and probably hurt. It wasn't right what he did, but it's not right for us to live with hatred."

"I don't care about that." Aqua said, his voice still in anger. "He tried to kill you, and I'm glad Eren managed to k-"

"Come here Aqua-Chan." Ai said seriously, cutting him off.

Ai placed Ruby on the ground and had both of her children stand next to each other in front of her. Ai kneeled down, placing a hand on each of their heads as she made sure to look both of them in the eyes.

Aqua had anger in his eyes, she could see that. He seemed cold and indifferent lately, more so than usual. Like something was plaguing his mind and wouldn't leave him. It was like he was scanning everything around him and listening to every conversation with complete focus to try and learn something. It almost reminded her of how Eren would look when she was around him.

It terrified her to see the same anger and paranoia in her son as she saw in Eren.

"Listen, both of you." Ai said. "I know what happened was scary, and no, Ryosuke had no right to do what he did. But no matter what happens or what people may try to do to us, we must be better than that. We can't let anger or fear dictate us. We can't let these feelings make us do or say things we'll regret."

"It wasn't right Ai." Aqua said, looking down.

"That's right, it wasn't." Ai said. "But I am your mother, and I don't want to see you both go down a road of anger, bitterness, sadness, or fear because of what happened. You both are much too important to me for that to happen."

Ai held both children to her chest as she spoke, wanting them to know that they felt loved.

Feel loved? Yet even now, Ai lacked the courage to say those words out loud. She was too afraid to utter a simple "I love you" to her own children. Yet here she is, holding them to her chest and making sure that they felt a sense of security and love.

"Promise me, that no matter what happens, you both won't ever change." Ai said to both of them.

Ruby held onto Ai tightly as she spoke. Ruby promised her mother that she would do as she's told and would never change who she is. Ruby wanted nothing more than to please the woman who gave her hope and inspiration in that hospital while she slowly lost her fight to cancer. The woman who made every moment in her life a joy and inspiration. How she was even to get Doctor Goro interested into idols, even though he was older.

Aqua though, couldn't make that promise. He was already changed from how he used to be. His own promise to protect Ai and her children, which only now constituted Ruby; and his own death has already hardened him past that point. This mission to protect Ai was never anything new in his mind, only that now he couldn't afford to let his guard down while the mastermind was still out there.

"Aqua, please." Ai said, letting go of her embrace of her children and looking him in the eye.

Aqua couldn't. He simply couldn't promise her that he wouldn't lose himself if she died. Even now, as her life was in danger, he felt nothing less than a desire to put his own life in danger for her protection. In the end, if he died it wouldn't be a loss. He was on borrowed time anyway. But Ai could live a happy life, especially with Ruby. Maybe one day she could have more children, hopefully normal children that weren't reborn.

But he couldn't let her die. He just couldn't.

"I promise Ai." Aqua lied.

Ai felt herself wanting to cry. Her son lied to her, she knew that. A mother's promise wasn't enough to make him have a good future.

Eren was right, if she did die, then he would have gone down a dark road alone. He would grow up, angry and bitter towards the world, and never know the warmth and love of others. He would destroy himself in his anger, and it broke her heart.

"I'll make a promise to you Aqua-Chan." Ai smiled at him. "I promise that no matter what, mama will live. I'll always be by your side when you feel angry, sad, or scared. And I will always be there to protect you. I will never leave you or Ruby-Chan." She said.

Ai would fight to live for her children. If they were in danger again, she would do whatever it takes to live for them. Even if she gives her life in saving them, it would still doom them to a dark and painful future. She would find a way to live no matter what. She would simply refuse to die, either by illness, murder, or natural disaster. For no other reason, than to ensure her son and daughter have a long and happy life.

"You're Eren, right?" The man near the alleyway said.

"Yes." Eren said in an annoyed tone.

In the past few days, Eren did some jobs helping Sergei with simple deliveries and gun runs, mainly as a way to stay busy and earn some extra money. Sergei wasn't paying much since the jobs were simple, but it helped keep Eren fed and pay his rent.

However, tonight the Yakuza boss wanted Eren to go on a more extreme mission. He called Eren over the moveable phone and instructed him to meet with one of his lackies. Eren was lucky he was able to refill the energy in his phone, since it ended up not

working and he had to put the wire in the moveable phone in order to fill that canteen picture.

The location of the meet was on the outer edge of Tokyo, Eren needed to get a ride from Sergei, so Sergei timed it in order to coincide with one of his own drops.

"I'm Raido, I'll be your handler on this job." He said.

The man as skinny and had a shaved head. Eren put his age at about mid-twenties based on his face and lack of wrinkles. However, like many of the members he saw, this man was covered in that permanent body paint that depicted mythical creatures and fish.

"Fine." Eren said. "So, what's the job?"

"You brought your gun and ammo, right?" He asked.

"Yes." Eren said.

"We're going on a hit. Another Yakuza boss is coming onto our turf, so we need to take him and his group out." Raido explained.

"How many?" Eren asked.

"Maybe half a dozen, they're moving Yen to a drop in order to pay off some of the other gangs. We're going to intercept them."

Eren had no qualms with killing rival gang members. The only thing he cared about on this job was making some more money in order to sustain himself, as well as getting his papers.

"You have my passport and ID, right?" Eren asked.

"Of course." Raido took a small blue book from his pocket. "This is a Ukrainian Passport. Since you're illiterate, Sergei recommended that you pose as a Ukrainian citizen. Main reason is that Ukraine has very little tourism in Japan so the odds of you running into a Ukrainian person is almost non-existent." He said.

"Ukraine, don't they speak Sergei's language?" Eren asked.

"You'll be from Crimea, which is a southern part of Ukraine that was recently invaded and occupied by the Russian Federation. Crimea has regional dialects that are distinct from Russian. It's not a perfect plan, since you should at least know Russian, but there are dialects of Crimean Tatar."

"Crimean Tatar?" Eren asked.

"It's a dying language, perfect for your situation." Raido said. "It's an offshoot of Turkish Arabic, so it's completely different from Russian. As long as you don't run into anyone from Ukraine here, you should be fine with this identity. Be careful though, Crimeans haven't had Ukrainian passports since the invasion. So, it's dated to before the invasion."

"Wouldn't that be odd?" Eren asked.

"To escape from occupied Crimea? Not at all." Raido said.

"So I escaped from the Russian Federation with an older passport that's no longer recognized?" Eren questioned.

"NATO as a whole recognizes it. Japan may not be a Nato Nation, but they're buddy buddies with them. So, they recognize it." Raido explained. "But that only protects against an initial look. If anyone runs that number through a database, you'll be caught." He explained.

"So how did I get here from Crimea?" Eren asked.

"I don't know..." Raido thought for a moment. "Just say you were forcefully recruited last year into the Russian army and sent to Syria. The Middle East would be a perfect place to desert the Army and find a new home." He guessed.

Middle East? Similar to the Mid East? The names were pretty much identical. If the cultures were anything similar, it would actually work for Eren since he did technically fight for the past year in the Mid East with Marley. The best lies were the ones with a bit of truth afterall.

"How do you know so much?" Eren asked.

"Who do you think made those for you?" Raido asked. "I'm only here to help guide you, nothing more. You're the fighter, I'm the thinker. Your idiotic self would never be able to come up with a good plan."

Eren frowned at once again being called an idiot. He seriously hated the people in this country, no, this whole damn world. Everything was so new and alien that he struggled with basic things. He had an education in the Cadet Corp, he learned how to read and write, he even learned basic engineering since Soldiers were expected to build and maintain machines in the walls.

He doubted this man had the ability to build a fully functioning lift on the walls from nothing more than a few trees and simple hand tools. Even though there were stocks, every Soldier was drilled how to build contraptions to aid in the fight against the Titans.

"Go to hell Raido." Eren growled.

"What, you're upset about being called an idiot?" He shrugged. "Get over it kid, I'm not paid nearly enough to deal with you. Get angry or don't, I don't really care."

"Where is this ambush supposed to be?" Eren asked.

"They'll be driving by soon, right an intersection that's usually empty by this time of night. You'll simply walk up when they stop and shoot the boss while trying not to get shot yourself." Raido said as he put his hands behind his head.

Eren recognized the tactic, it was the same one that was used on him and Sergei on his first job. It seems that the various Yakuza groups used the same tactics.

"Keep your hood up, there aren't a lot of CCTV cameras around here, but it's still dangerous." Raido said.

"Sea, Sea what?" Eren asked.

"CCTV, you know, cameras?" Raido asked.

Eren remained silent, aware that he asked another stupid question.

"I know I put you in the middle of nowhere in Crimea, but seriously, did you actually come from the middle of nowhere?" Raido asked. "They'll record anything and can be reviewed later. If your face is caught, then you're screwed. The police will find you."

Police? As in Military Police? Eren guessed they were the blue guards and authorities he's seen around, but he never actually heard their name. He assumed they were similar to the Marleyan Public Security Division who dealt with local crimes. Or, they could be an offshoot of this world's Military, similar to their own MP Regiment.

Eren had his hood up already, but now he needed to make sure it stayed on.

"They'll be here another hour, get some rest before it happens." Raido said, sitting down on a box that was in the alley.

Eren stayed standing, watching outside the alley and waiting for the vehicle that would approach. Raido would point it out for him when he saw it, so all Eren had to do was kill the Yakuza Boss in the car. He had a general description, but Eren may have to kill some of his guards as well. It should be an easy job for him, but he didn't want to let his guard down.

This job had to go well, he desperately needed that book.

Ai was about to fall asleep in the small waiting room. Aqua and Ruby were pacing from boredom since they have been waiting for almost thirty minutes for Meimei to get the swimsuits for her to try on. Ai was dozing in and out but forced herself to stay awake. She thought about calling Meimei to see where she was.

"Ok!" Meimei came through the door, maybe a dozen swimsuits in her hands. "Now let's see what we can do for you!" She said in excitement.

"Aren't these a bit much Meimei?" Ai asked, looking at all the swimsuits.

"Come on, it'll be fun." Meimei smiled. "We'll find a swimsuit that'll make sure Eren can't keep his eyes off you."

"I'm surprised you're ok with this, since you didn't like Eren." Ai said.

"I never said I didn't like him, just that I'm worried." Meimei said. "But you're a grown woman and allowed to do what you want. So, I'll help regardless. Who knows, maybe I'm wrong."

"Again Meimei, this isn't a date." Ai tried to deny.

"Quit complaining and put this on." She through a navy-blue piece of fabric at her.

"Really?" Ai asked, looking the swimsuit up and down.

"It's a good one, I might go with it if I was in your position." Meimei laughed.

The swimsuit in question was a school styled, one piece swimsuit. At least, it's the fetishized version. Swimsuits in the past few decades got a lot more conservative, such as being full shirts and shorts for both girls and boys. This was just one that the media always fetishized and showed in animes.

"A schoolgirl swimsuit?" Ai asked.

"He's a westerner, right?" Meimei asked. "We can play into the yellow fever aspect with this one. I have an actual sailor fuku styled one, complete with a collar." She held up the red and blue sailor fuku inspired one piece.

"No, I will not even try these on." Ai said.

"Oh come on, it's perfect. I'm telling you. I had a friend that dated a western man and he loved it." Meimei tried to convince.

Ai threw the swimsuit back into Meimei's arms, absolutely refusing to even try it on.

"I honestly doubt Eren would like it." Ai said. "He knows nothing of Japanese culture."

Aqua breathed a sigh of relief hearing that. Last thing he needed was Ai jumping around in what was basically an etchi cosplay.

Ruby though, was a bit disappointed. She thought the outfits were kind of cute and matched some of the animes that she watched, both as Ruby and in her previous life. What's the big deal anyway? They're just costumes, she didn't even understand why westerners apparently found those appealing. She knew a bit about the idea of sex since she was twelve before she died, but wouldn't a bikini be more revealing than those?

"Ok, then what about this." Meimei held up another one.

"Are you planning on taking up knitting?" Ai asked.

The... "Bikini", if you could even call it that, was a bunch of strings with small pieces of cloth that probably wouldn't hide anything. It was the definition of skimpy.

"If you don't want to lean into a fetish, we could try etchi." Meimei winked.

"You do remember that my kids will be there too." Ai pointed to the kids.

Yes, Aqua thought. For the love of whatever higher power reincarnated him, please do not let Ai wear that. He did not need to see Ai in that way at all.

Ruby had much the same idea. She did not want to basically be in a public area with her mother and favorite idol walking around basically naked.

"Oh come on, you bathed with them still, right?" Meimei asked. "Not like they care at that age."

"Actually, I haven't bathed with Aqua since he was very little." Ai said out loud.

"Really?" Meimei asked.

Yes, Aqua thought again. He never felt comfortable bathing with Ai, again, half his actual age. He glanced over at Ruby who glared at him. He looked back and shrugged at her. The moment he could prove he was old enough to bathe without drowning, Aqua never again bathed with Ai or Ruby.

"Aw, is little Aqua-Chan embarrassed." Meimei said in a baby like voice.

Aqua just crossed his arms and stayed silent, refusing to even blush at the teasing.

"Awe, what a little man." Meimei laughed at his tough guy display.

"How about something cute." Ai recommended. "Something I can wear in front of my kids and still look appealing."

"Ok, we'll try this one." She held out a purple bikini.

The bikini had a good amount of covering, so her butt and breasts would be fully concealed. It also had a skirt so she could hide the lower part of the bikini while still showing off her legs.

"The skirt will give you a cute and conservative look, but since it's a bikini you can show off your naval." Meimei said. "Cute, but not too conservative like a one piece. Plus, it'll show off your breasts a bit more."

Ai agreed to try this on since it was the best option. She didn't want to come off as too revealing since she would be with her kids and she wanted to give Ruby a positive role model. Who knows what Ruby would do as a teenager if she always saw her mother acting like a harlot. Plus, it would be bad if they did get seen in the private location, that the innocent Ai was being completely etchi. It would cause a huge controversy.

After trying it on, they found the style they wanted to go with. Meimei went to go get more since the ones she tried on didn't fully fit right. Some had the lower part too loose, or it was too tight around her breasts. She needed to get the right size so that it would not only look good but be well fitted.

After her, they got a cute one-piece swimsuit for Ruby that had a skirt built into the one piece. Aqua was actually the easiest to get. All he needed was some well fitted swim trunks and a shirt for when he wasn't swimming. Ai was always so jealous of how easy it was for boys to get a swimsuit. They only had him try on two and they found his size. Her and Ruby had to go through at least half a dozen each to get the right sizing.

Once they finished, Ai went with Meimei to get some food and some other basic supplies. Main things she needed was strong sunscreen to protect herself and her kids from the sun. They also got large and heavy towels since even though the weather was predicting a warmer than normal Saturday, it was still fall so it would be cold when they went into the ocean.

Although it wasn't the best time for most people to go, it was perfect for B-Komachi. Afterall, most people don't go to the beach in the fall and the prices for a private beach would be lower than if it was summer.

After getting some Ramen from a restaurant, they decided to head home after a job well done. Ai was glad they all had a good time, even if Aqua still had that paranoid look about him. He did manage to get some rest in the car, but he was still just so on edge.

Ai was still worried about him. She wasn't sure how he would react to the situation and knew that she couldn't take him to get looked at. If she did, it could reveal her identity as an idol. Maybe Miyako and the President could take him to see a specialist, but she was still worried about that. What if he responded negatively to therapy?

Ruby seemed mostly unaffected, maybe a bit more affectionate and scared, but nowhere near the same level of anger and bitterness that Aqua felt. If he acted like this when Ai almost died, she shivered to imagine how he would be if she did actually die.

She had to find a way to keep Aqua's mind off of what happened and make him happy again. Maybe some kisses? No, he always fought against that.

Ai felt so useless at what to do with her son. She had to make sure he didn't end up cold and sad like Eren. She also wanted to make sure he didn't get bitter and angry like her ex. There were so many roads he could go down, and she needed to make sure he took the right ones to stay healthy and happy.

Hopefully this vacation would make him feel better.

So, this I really thought about.

I tried to come up with a believable story for Eren that would explain some of the strange things about him. Considering Oshi No Ko takes

place about mid 2010s at Ai's death, it would be possible that Eren was from a rural part of Crimea, experienced the invasion, and went to war in Syria under an army he pretended to support. It at least gives him possible explanation while at the same time being close to his actual situation. All thanks to Sergei's suggestions lol. I hope it's at least somewhat believable.

Anyway, hope you liked this chapter. Next one will get a bit of action.

The Trap is Set

Chapter 15: The Trap is Set

"Get ready kid." Raido said as they saw a single lone car drive towards the intersection. "The boss will be in the back with his security, make sure to take them out."

Eren took out his pistol and pulled the bolt back slightly, inspecting to make sure there was a round in the chamber. He let it ride forward and cocked the hammer back, so it was ready to fire. He had additional clips in his pocket in case he needed to reload.

Eren had potentially up to six targets with ten rounds before needing to reload so he'd need to take them out quick. Eren took a quick breath before walking out of the alley and ensuring his hood was up.

Raido told him that the lights were changed so that he could control them, so Raido was going to make it so that as they approached the light would turn red, effectively stopping them. Eren would use that chance to go up to them and shoot them before they could react. It would be effective in dealing with them before they can shoot back.

Eren walked up to the car right as they were stopping. Before they could do anything, Eren went to the back and when he was almost within arm's reach, he took out his pistol and fired a few rounds into the men in the back.

The loud sounds of his shots drowned out the yells of the men, who were trying to react as they were hit with not only his bullets, but also the shattered shards of glass from their windows.

Eren noticed that there were three men in the back and one in the passenger seat. Including the driver, that was five in total. He used all ten rounds of his pistol on the three men in the back, making sure

that they were incapacitated. Many people can be shot and continue to fight, so he needed to ensure that they were unable to fight.

In moments, Eren reloaded a new clip as the passenger got out of the car and was in the process of drawing his own pistol.

Eren kicked him while he was getting out, causing the man to fall over before Eren executed him with a single shot to the head. The driver was fumbling with his own pistol before Eren pointed his pistol through the open door and fired a few more shots.

In probably less than five seconds, all the men were dead.

Eren turned around, ready to go to Raido in order to let him know the job was done, however he didn't get the chance.

Eren's eyes widened as he felt danger near him. He dove behind the front of the car as gunshots flew past him, barely missing him as he took cover. He heard the cracks as bullets flew over his head, but kept as much behind the car as he could.

"So you're the kid who killed my guys." Eren heard a broken English voice say in the distance.

Eren looked over the car for a moment and saw a group of well-armed men holding small two-handed guns. Sergei told him about those guns, Sub Machine Guns was it? Capable of firing in rapid succession like a water-cooled machine gun but only needing one person to use.

Eren looked at the guy in front. He was the target he was supposed to kill. The man was older, maybe in his thirties, but very skinny. He was dressed in a black suit pants, white shirt with the sleeves rolled up, and a black vest with a red tie that was very form fitting.

Eren was the one ambushed, not him.

"Come on kid, I'm going through the effort of speaking English, I'd appreciate a dialogue." He called over, holding what looked like some kind of gun with a cylinder over the trigger.

"What do you want?" Eren called over, trying to find a way to deal with them.

There were ten guys in the street, and with all those guns, Eren knew he would struggle with them.

"To talk." The boss said. "You killed some of my guys a little while ago, I'd like to get some payment."

"I didn't kill anyone." Eren said, not remembering ever killing anyone besides tonight.

"You were with the Russian a week or two ago, right?" The boss asked.

Sergei? Oh yea, his first job that ended in a couple of dead Yakuza thugs. He actually forgot about that.

"They tried to kill me." Eren said.

"And now they're dead, which is why I'm not going to be too upset." He said. "I also saw your little fight match, I'm impressed."

What is with the people here trying to manipulate him?

"Kanto is switching to a different gang soon, and I'll be the one taking over. Work for me, and I'll let you in on the benefits of playing for the winning side." He said.

So that's what this is, it's a war between two gangs. A new and smaller organization going against the larger and more established.

Eren cursed himself, he's fallen into a war that he has no interest in. Not only that, he's now known by the groups fighting, which means

they'll be less likely to let him walk away. Eren didn't want this, he just wanted to find way to sustain himself until he found better work.

"Come on kid, I'd hate to have to tell my men to hit their target in the next attack." He laughed.

Eren didn't care to switch sides. He didn't feel like trading one boss for another, so he decided to stand and fight.

Eren jumped from the car and quickly took a few shots at the guys before running in an alley. He saw a few guys get hit but wasn't able to get the boss. He heard yelling as they shot at him and began to chase him into the alleyway.

Eren went into one of the apartment buildings as they rounded the corner and ran upstairs. He got to the top of the stairs before quickly turning around and waited a few moments. Right when a thug came to the bottom of the stairs, he shot him until he was dead. They weren't expecting him to turn around.

Eren went over to a door and slammed his shoulder into it, breaking through and running into the apartment. Eren noticed a young girl and boy were there, probably young teenagers, who screamed when they saw Eren.

Eren's moment of hesitation cost him as he was tackled from behind by the thug. His shoulder exploded in pain as he slammed into the ground with the thug's full weight slammed on top of him. The thug took out a pocketknife and tried to stab Eren. Eren stopped the knife before overpowering him and stabbing him in the neck.

The man stepped back as Eren kept the folding knife with him. He pointed his gun at a few more thugs who tried to shoot him, but he was faster and hit them first.

Eren got up as a man and woman ran out of their rooms, probably the kids parents. Eren ran to their open window and shot it to break it open. He ran outside and jumped from the second floor.

Eren felt his stomach drop as he fell down to the street. Eren tucked and rolled as he hit the ground, his years of experience with ODM gear making it so that he was able to easily absorb the impact.

Eren turned down another alley, easily able to avoid the men who were chasing him. He needed to get to where Sergei was doing his deal, if nothing else, it would be another gun for Eren to rely on.

Eren noticed his left shoulder wasn't moving and screamed in pain. He knew this feeling enough to remember that he just had his shoulder dislocated. Eren has dislocated his joints dozens of times, so he's not surprised it happened.

However, another curse of being a shifter is how new it is every time he gets injured. Joint dislocations typically aren't permanent injuries, and in most cases relocating it will fix it. But the first dislocation is always the most painful since your tendons are fighting to get it back into place.

As the tendons stretch, further dislocations are easier and less painful. Dislocations actually become easier overtime, as long as there is no serious tearing.

Unfortunately, as a Titan shifter with fast healing, every dislocation was new. Hopefully now that his powers were gone, this will be the last time this shoulder explodes with pain from a dislocation.

Eren ran down the alley, hearing as the thugs began to lose him after exiting the apartment complex. He still had the folded knife so he folded it and put the blood covered blade in his pocket. His shoulder was limp and could barely move, but he needed to get away before more showed up. They had surprise and numbers on their side so he had to make a quick getaway.

"Kid, over here." Raido said from a door leading into a building.
"Police are on their way from the shots, we need to hide for a bit."

"What the hell happened?" Eren asked.

"Well, we confirmed what we were thinking." Raido said.

"Confirmed what?" Eren asked as he sat down against the wall inside the hallway. The building seemed mostly abandoned so there was little chance that anyone was nearby.

"We expected the ambush to go poorly." Raido admitted.

"And you still sent me in?" Eren asked.

"I probably shouldn't tell you this, but it would only be fair if you knew." Raido said. "This was not only to confirm something, but a punishment for you."

"Punishment?" Eren asked.

"Yea, the boss got upset at your little act of rebellion, so he wanted to give you a punishment." Raido said, moving to Eren's side. "We need to get that shoulder back in its socket."

"Go ahead." Eren said as Raido kneeled down. "What was his plan? For me to die?"

"Kind of." Raido said as he took Eren's arm and moved it a bit. "He likes your skills, but he was upset. He figured you'd die and no longer be a problem, or live and still be useful."

"That bastard." Eren said angrily.

"Look, as far as the boss's anger, it's done." Raido said. "He'll consider it done and leave it be. I highly suggest you take the punishment and just keep doing what you're told. The boss is losing interest."

"He can go to hell." Eren said.

"This is going to hurt." Raido said.

"Just do it." Eren said.

Eren grunted in pain as his shoulder was forced back into its socket. The pain was minor compared to everything else he experienced, even as a Titan. Eren worked the shoulder a bit in order to ensure it was still able to move. Luckily, it didn't seem like there was any major tearing.

"What did this confirm?" Eren asked.

"There's a rat in our group." Raido said. "This ambush was meant to see if there was a rat who sold us out. To be honest, I was expecting the police to show up, not a rival gang."

"Who are they?" Eren asked.

"They're the *Nakano-Kai*, a small group based out of the *Osaka* Prefecture, up in the *Kansai* Region." He said.

"What do they want?" Eren asked.

"They're probably trying to expand their influence into the Kanto Region." He said. "Their boss has been looking to make a name for himself for a while now. He already has influence in the surrounding *Chubu* and *Chugoku* Regions."

"Who is he?" Eren asked.

"Not too many people know." Raido said. "That's a question for *Oyabun* ." He said.

"So, he wants to expand into the city?" Eren asked.

"Yes, but it's not easy." Raido said. "Few gangs have been able to expand into Tokyo, given how difficult it is. The largest family here is the *Inagawa-Kai*, that's us."

"I'm not interested in getting myself in a gang war." Eren said.

"Well, too late for that." Raido laughed as he patted Eren on his injured shoulder, causing Eren to wince. "You're more or less stuck

now. One Oyabun wants you dead and the other one is just barely wanting you alive. You're stuck either way."

"I'm glad you find this amusing." Eren growled.

"It kind of is. What, you expected to do a few jobs with some gangs and expect it to be mansions and luxuries from there?" Aside from the wealth part, that is exactly what Eren thought.

"I made it clear I only wanted to do a few jobs." Eren said.

"And unfortunately, the *Oyabun* has different ideas." Raido said. "Anyway, it should be good to move now. They're likely gone, and the police will only have a few guys at the scene. So, we should leave before they close off the street and more guys show up."

"Wait." Eren said before he left. "My papers."

"Oh yea, sorry." He laughed. "Here you go." Raido handed him his payment and the papers for tonight's job. "I'm honestly glad you survived, otherwise I would have wasted my time on these."

Eren stood up, moving his sore shoulder to get it working again. He was pissed at the situation but decided to go meet up with Sergei so he could get a ride back to his apartment.

"Finally, done with the fried rice." Ai said happily as she carefully moved the very large pot of fried rice to the table where everyone sat.

Her small apartment was filled with all the girls and Miyako from B-Komachi. President Saitou was busy preparing the trip and getting the funding from Strawberry Productions, so he wasn't able to come. Miyako finished watching the kids so Ai could get the groceries and decided to stay for the food.

"It looks delicious Ai." Meimei smiled.

"Agreed, the food looks good." Nino offered her own commentary.

Since her table was small, many of the girls were either on the floor or on the couch and would simply hold the bowls so they could eat. Aqua and Ruby were at the table since they were kids and they didn't want them balancing the bowls while eating. It would be too much for young children and Ai didn't want to clean a mess.

"Can you sit next to me mama?" Ruby asked.

"Aw, but what about Aqua-Chan?" Ai said in a sad tone. "Shouldn't he sit with us too?"

"No!" Ruby yelled. "I want mama to myself." She said very possessively.

"Wow Ai, she's ordering you around." Meimei laughed.

"I know." Ai laughed. "I have such a needy daughter."

As they sat around and ate, all the girls gossiped and laughed about the past week. Much of it was some of the activities they did in between rehearsals and foods they tried out. Even a few close calls where one of them was almost recognized on the street.

Some of the conversations shifted over to Ai, much to her embarrassment. Meimei told them all about the trip to get her a swimsuit and the girls laughed at her expense.

"I really think you should have gone with the Sailor Fuku one." Watanabe laughed.

"Why would I go with a fetishized swimsuit." Ai grumbled as she glared at her coworker.

"Because he's a westerner." Watanabe laughed. "It would have worked so well."

"I told Meimei, Eren isn't like most westerners." Ai said. "He doesn't even like idols, one of the biggest things in Japan. I doubt he'd know what a Sailor Fuku even is."

"That is a shame." Nino asked. "I've tried flirting with a few westerners before. Some of them are more Otaku than Japanese Otaku's."

"We just need to find what Eren is interested in." Ari said.

"Yea, some kind of fun activity." Kyun agreed.

"Everyone has a hobby; we just need to find his." Meimei agreed.

"Weren't all you girls against Eren before?" Miyako asked from the couch.

"Well, yea, but that was before he saved Ai." Watanabe said.

"It was so romantic." Nino laughed.

Romantic... right. Ai did not think it was romantic in the slightest. She was grateful and could even say she found Eren defending her to be somewhat attractive, but she could hardly say it was romantic.

She remembered the rage on Eren's face. The complete bloodlust that overtook him. A rage that had to have been born from some kind of deep-seated trauma that he experienced. She had a good idea that it may have reminded him of his own mother's death, but the event itself was horrifying.

Not to mention she almost died, and her children were in danger. Then there was hearing Ryosuke's muffled screams as his face was crushed and the knife in his chest was twisted. There was nothing romantic about that in anyway.

But the girls seemed to actually be supportive of Eren now, so she wasn't going to argue with them on this.

"I still think all you girls are crazy." Miyako said. "He's dangerous and if I was you Ai, I'd tell him to leave."

"It'll be ok Miyako-San." Meimei laughed. "We'll protect Ai if he ever gets violent."

"Yes, because you'll all be so intimidating to a fully grown and dangerous man." Miyako said sarcastically.

"Well, how about we watch some TV to pass the time." Ai said after finishing her own bowl. She moved over to the remote in order to turn on the TV. "I hope you guys don't mind watching a kid anime." Ai said, wanting to keep the show kid friendly while Aqua and Ruby were here.

"No problem, that'll be alright with us." Meimei said, causing the other girls to agree.

Ai picked up the remote and hit the power button, giving the smart TV a moment to boot up. When it did, it showed all the apps that were on the TV. Ai put on the cable app, which took it to the last channel that was open.

" We're still waiting on information as to what happened during the fight. " A news anchor said as they played footage of a random street in the city.

"What the, why is it on the news?" Ai asked.

Ai knew for a fact that she never watched the news. She'd search it on her phone occasionally, but she never had it playing on the TV so that her kids wouldn't see it.

"Aqua-Chan." Au called out, slightly upset. "Were you watching adult shows while I wasn't looking?"

"Uh... no?" He lied, poorly.

"He was mama." Ruby snitched. "He always puts it on when I want to watch anime."

What a snitch, aqua thought. She'll do anything to one up him with Ai, especially rat him out to Ai so she can have more time with her.

"Aqua-Chan, what did I say about watching adult shows." Ai said.

"Wait, what is it talking about?" Meimei asked, paying attention to the news.

" We have confirmation that this is similar to the event that happened in the Toyama Prefecture, during a gang war between two Yakuza gangs. " The reporter said. " CCTV cameras have also gotten a look at the ambush. "

The CCTV footage showed a man in a hoodie move up to a car in the street, before systematically executing the Yakuza members inside. The footage was grainy and hard to see, but it looked like he used a silver gun.

" Eyewitness reports show that this was an assassination attempt that was foiled. This recent event has shown a general increase in Yakuza attacks in the past few weeks. " The reporter said. " Additionally, Police have released some information showing an apparent gang war starting in Tokyo. Residents are advised to report suspicious activity and not to be alarmed as the Police are working on bringing the suspects to justice. "

The camera switched over to a man in a formal police uniform giving a speech from a notecard he held. He seemed important but Ai couldn't guess who he was. She guessed he was in charge of the Police in the area, maybe a Captain or whatever the police used.

" So far, we have gathered information that there is a potential increase in gang activities, however I want to stress that reports have been overblown so far and I urge the public not to panic. " He said. " At this time, I have inspectors and agents working to bring the

culprits of these crimes to justice and I assure you, they will be. This is nothing more than disagreements between Yakuza groups that turned violent, and we suspect that public order will be returned quickly. "

" However, we have also gotten reports of an unusual suspect. Reports came in of a western individual has been employed by the Inagawa-Kai Group and has been helping them traffic firearms as well as apparent assassination attempts. While I cannot confirm these reports at this time, we will be investigating these claims. We urge the people of Tokyo to please report any suspicious activities and please do not panic. "

Once he was finished, the channel went back to the main news station and started to go over different topics for the night.

"Wow, that's scary." Meimei said.

"Yea, a gang war in Tokyo?" Nino asked.

"Come on girls, didn't you hear what they said? It's being overblown." Watanabe said.

"Still, apparently there is a western criminal helping them out." Kyun said.

"How do you think they know?" Ai asked her friends. "I mean, if they know who it is, shouldn't they arrest him?"

"Well, if they're saying it's unconfirmed, maybe they have an informant." She said. "Someone who's giving information to the police, so they don't have a lot of information yet."

"Still, that is scary." Ai said.

"Mama." Ruby called over. "Are those the criminals you were talking about before?" Ruby asked.

"Yes Ruby-Chan." Ai smiled, wanting her daughter to feel safe, even if everyone was scared. "But don't you worry, the police will find them and bring them to justice." She said.

"Yea, there's nothing to worry about." Meimei said in the same tone.

Aqua didn't really care much about the situation. It was nice to know about that, but the odds of being caught up in any of those clashes was astronomically rare. Occasionally Yakuza groups clashed, he even had a few come through the hospital with various wounds before being arrested.

After all, it was just random crime. It's not the same as someone who is specifically targeting Ai.

After switching to a more kid appropriate show, the girls all huddled around the TV to watch it with Ruby.

Aqua noticed that the anime was actually something that Sarina would used to watch, and Ruby seemed to be just as invested. It's not too surprising, since Ruby was probably young and would have similar interests.

Once it got late, everyone left the apartment and Ai got her Futon out in order to put them all to bed.

"You look like shit." Sergei said as Eren came into the abandoned garage. Inside, Sergei already had a few weapons crates ready to deliver to the buyer.

"Did you do your deal yet?" Eren said, ignoring the man.

"No, buyer never showed up. How did job go?" He asked.

"They wanted me to kill a rival gang boss, it ended up being a trap for me." Eren said.

"You escaped?" Sergei asked.

"Yea, though not without injury." Eren said, his shoulder still sore from the encounter. "They were the same bastards who tried to kill us on that first job."

"I kind of figured, you're already on news." Sergei said.

"News?" Eren asked.

Sergei took out his moveable phone and showed Eren the screen, showing the video that recently played and explaining that not only was there an increase in violence, but also that he was helping the Yakuza.

"How do they know?" Eren asked.

"Probably rat or undercover cop feeding information." Sergei explained. "Best watch out."

"Damn it!" Eren slammed his fist into the wall.

"Calm down." Sergei said.

"This is getting out of control." Eren said through gritted teeth. "I don't want to get mixed up in a damn war, and not only that, but the son of a bitch also has a grudge against me for killing his men."

"You mean other boss?" Sergei asked.

"Yea, the bastard taunted me. Now I'm stuck between two bosses and their damn feud."

Eren was frustrated. He never expected things to snowball so unexpectedly. Now, he's caught the attention of the authorities and they're going to try and find a way to hunt him down. He never intended to do more than a few jobs for Sergei or the Yakuza. He needed resources until he could find more legitimate work, but now he was stuck in another war with no way out other than fighting.

And if it came down to it, Eren would fight.

"I'm just fumbling around in the dark. I know nothing of this place and can't even read. I can't learn anything about the world and all this technology is insane." He said in frustration.

"You truly know nothing?" Sergei asked. "How is it that you know next to nothing?"

"Because I'm not from this world Sergei." Eren admitted, more out of frustration than anything. "I'm from another world with a different written language and geography. We're also at least a century behind in technology, so I know nothing."

Sergei stared at Eren as he stared back. Eren maintained eye contact the whole time with Sergei, making Sergei honestly believe him. Eren didn't care anymore if Sergei knew, he was too frustrated with the situation.

Suddenly, Sergei laughed. He laughed so hard that he started to hold his stomach from the cramping of his diaphragm. Sergei almost cried with how much he laughed.

"You should be actor, you actually convinced me." Sergei laughed. "I honestly believed you with how seriously you delivered that. It was good joke."

No surprise there, he didn't believe Eren. Who would. Even Eren wouldn't believe someone if they came to Paradis and said they were from another world.

"Come, let's take you home." He said.

Sergei and Eren loaded up the guns that were still not sold into Sergei's car. Sergei got in and started his way back to Eren's apartment, making sure to avoid the scene where Eren ambushed the car.

Eren was silent the entire time. He felt completely hopeless and alone. No one would ever believe his situation and no one could help him in the way that he needed. Ai did kind of help, but even then Eren still had to be careful about what he said so he didn't sound suspicious to her.

"You got papers, da?" Sergei asked.

"Right here." Eren showed him the ID and Passport.

"Ukraine, glad they went with my idea." Sergei said. "How much of area in Ukraine do you know?"

"Only the names Ukraine and Crimea." Eren said.

"You don't know about surrounding countries?" He asked.

"I already told you that I know nothing Sergei." Eren said. "That's not a lie."

"I believe that part." Sergei said. "You grew up in isolated community, right?"

"Yes." Eren said, which was true since the island was isolated from the world.

"When did you become Soldier?" Sergei asked.

"When I was twelve." Eren answered.

"So, you're child Soldier then." Sergei said, though had a bit of a sad tone. "I've met many child Soldiers before. I'll help you to learn about geography, and then you can come up with backstory from there to fit new ID."

Sergei gave a long and in-depth explanation of the political situation in Europe and the Middle East. He started with general politics from World War One and moved on from there. He explained the Defensive Pacts that lead to the starting of the war and the defeat of

the Germany. He also explained the rise of the Soviet Union, his own country, and the brutal dictatorship it experienced under Joseph Stalin.

From there he went into an in-depth explanation of World War Two, which amazed Eren. Eren never had a concept of an entire world at war aside from the Rumbling, though that was far from a war. Sergei went on to talk about the rise of the Nazi party as well as the invasion of Poland which started the war. He talked about how the USSR fought back and with the help of the allies, they defeated Nazi Germany.

However, this caused the former free Eastern European Countries to become subjugated by the USSR, which eventually lead to their independence after an almost forty year standoff between NATO and the Warsaw Pact.

This was largely why Crimea was occupied, since the current Russian regime wants to try to re-establish its former power and create a buffer zone from NATO, as well as controlling shipping in the Black Sea.

"That's very bare bones, and honestly really simplifies a complex issue." Sergei admitted. "But at least you can build yourself a false identity from this."

Lastly, he went into the history of the Middle East, from the fall of the Ottoman Empire to the Global War on Terror which was spearheaded by the United States. How after the US withdrew from Iraq in 2011, a splinter group of Al Qaeda called ISIS rose to power and now currently controls large portions of Syria and northern Iraq.

"The US is currently spearheading an effort with the Iraqi Army to retake Mosul, the largest city in the Nineva Province." Sergei said. "It's expected that the US will control it by the end of the year, though they'll have a hard push to Ar Raqqa, but the Russian Army has been there for the past year conducting their own operations against Syrian Rebels and ISIS fighters."

Based on Sergeis information, Eren knew now that this Middle East was almost exactly the same in terms of culture and geography as his own Mid East Region in his world. This meant that Eren would be able to come up with a somewhat believable backstory.

"Now you have information to make believable backstory." Sergei said.

"Thanks Sergei." Eren said honestly.

"Don't worry kid." He replied.

"What I don't get is," Eren began. "Why help me with this? Isn't it suspicious that I know nothing about this?"

"Without a doubt." Sergei said. "But what do I care? You're good with gun and I'm criminal. As long as you keep up good work, I don't care if you told me you're from Mars." Eren didn't know what that was. "I get that there are things people don't want to talk about, especially if you were child Soldier."

There was that word again. Eren really didn't have a concept of child Soldiers in this world. Sure, the minimum age for the Cadet Corp was twelve, but even in Marley, Eldian conscripts could be expected to join the armed forces as young as ten. After all, they weren't children, they were devils.

Eren scoffed at the thought.

"So, what will you do now?" Sergei asked.

"I don't know." Eren said in a defeated tone. "I'm stuck between two gangs that both want me dead."

"Meaning you may have to pick a side." Sergei said. "The boss you have now is strong, but this new rival can be dangerous."

"I know." Eren said. "But this new guy wants me dead, and he'll do whatever he can to kill me. Especially after that ambush."

"I'm surprised you struggled." Sergei said.

"They caught me off guard, I wasn't expecting those small machine-guns." Eren said. "If Captain Levi saw me now, he'd kick me in the face for failing to anticipate that." Eren let a smirk grace his lips. "It won't happen again."

"So you'll keep working for original boss?" Sergei asked.

"Yes, but on my terms." Eren said.

"How so?" Sergei asked.

"Hold up." Eren said, his phone was ringing. "It's the boss." He said.

"Go ahead." Sergei said.

Eren answered the call and put it up to his ear.

"Heard about the job." The boss said. "It's a shame you couldn't get him, but no one could expect that ambush."

"That's a lie." Eren said.

"Excuse me?" The boss said.

Sergei motioned for Eren to shut up, to just take the answer he was given at face value and not call the boss out for trying to get him killed.

"You were using me as bait in order to get me killed and confirm that you have a rat." Eren said angrily.

"Sometimes, my people have to be disciplined." The boss said in an angry voice.

"I'm not one of your people." Eren said. "But if you want to do that, then you might as well give me something better."

"What?" The boss asked.

"You give me a target, and it will die." Eren said. "I don't give a damn if it's a suicide mission. I'll kill them and that's all."

"Really?" He wondered. "You said you're upset at being sent to your death and now you want to rush into an even worse situation?"

"I told you, I won't be a slave to you." Eren said. "But if you want to see what I'm really capable of, I'll show you. But I'm doing it on my terms, not yours. I won't let you control me, but I'll show you how dangerous I can be."

There was a long silence over the phone. The boss was really considering Eren's proposal.

"If you want an early death, I'll give it to you." He said. "We know where one of their safe houses are, it's very well defended and armed. It's suicide even for a group of fighters to go. So, if you want an early death, there it is."

"Where?" Eren asked.

"I'll give you the details next week. Good luck kid. Try to at least kill a few before you die." He hung up.

"Are you insane?" Sergei asked.

"It won't be an issue." Eren said. "I'll show that bastard that I am not to be taken lightly."

"Who do you think you are?" Sergei asked. "Do you have any idea how impossible it is for one man to clear an entire building? You'll be killed. And for what? Pride?"

"I live my own way Sergei." Eren said. "If I win, I live. It's that simple."

Sergei reached over and hit Eren in his bad shoulder, eliciting a yell from the young man.

"Damn it!" Eren cursed.

"You think you're big shot? You think you can do whatever? You think it's just your life? What about single mother? Don't you care what she thinks?" Sergei said angrily.

"Who gives a damn what she thinks!?" Eren yelled. "I was on borrowed time anyway. I'm not even supposed to be alive anyway!"

"You're fucking fool, you know that!?" Sergei yelled back.

"I don't need to be lectured." Eren growled.

"If you want to go to your death, fine. This Sunday, you come with me."

"For what?" Eren asked.

"I'll see what you can do. See how good you are at fight in close quarters." He said.

"I already proved myself." Eren said.

"Not indoor fight. Either do it, or I stop employing you." He made an ultimatum.

"Fine." Eren said. "Have it your way."

The rest of the ride was silent.

The doorbell woke Ai up and she got out of the Futon to go see who it was. She looked at the time and saw that it was morning, at least a few minutes before her alarm was set to go off. She quickly shut the alarm off since she was awake anyway.

Ai was careful not to disturb Ruby, who was still asleep. Curiously, Aqua was already awake and heading out of the room. He didn't seem like he just woke up, more like he was awake for a while.

Ai was worried about his sleeping lately. Normally, Aqua would sleep any chance he got, and it was hard to wake him up. Now though, he was falling asleep after her and waking up before her. She was worried that he would get exhausted from the lack of sleep. After all, it was bad for not only your skin, but your mind as well.

Miyako told her it was normal, since they were attacked. He was just having trouble sleeping and was likely defensive about anything going on. It broke her heart to see her son acting so paranoid, but she let it go since Miyako said he just needed time to get over what happened.

"Hey Aqua-Chan, let mama get the door." She said, not letting him answer the door.

She was still paranoid about letting him near the front door alone after what happened. She was lucky he was just a hostage and not the target, otherwise there would have been nothing she could have done.

"I got it Ai." He said.

There he goes being a grown up again.

"No Aqua-Chan, you go watch some TV. I'll see who it is and get breakfast ready." She said.

Ai went up to the door, which was not only locked, but had a heavy duty stop lock attached to the door. President Saitou used his own money for it, so she could crack it open and if anyone forced their way in, it would be stopped. It's similar to the chain that a lot of hotels use, but much stronger. Ai had her phone with her as well, just in case she needed to call the police.

Ai cracked open the door.

"Hello, can I-" Ai froze in surprise.

"Hey Ai-Chan, long time no see." The man smiled through the cracked door. "Can I come in?" He asked.

"H-Hikaru?" Ai asked.

And now for another cliff hanger.

Hope you guys enjoyed this one. I'll admit, I am not fully feeling the dialogue here, but I think it's serviceable. If this was a real story, I think I'd rewrite it a few times. Oh well, more lessons learned lol.

So now the Yakuza plot line is starting to get more complicated and starting to meld with the Ai plotline. Obviously, the two plots will meet eventually, but things will start to pick up on that front.

Anyway, hope you guys enjoy.

Aqua Won't Let Him Near Ai

Chapter 16: Aqua Won't Let Him Near Ai

"H-Hikaru?" Ai stuttered in surprise as she saw her ex through the crack in the door.

"I have to admit, you still look as good in person as you did, what, five years ago now?" He flashed a charming smile, a smile that Ai will admit she blushed at.

"T-thanks, but why didn't you let me know you were coming?" She asked.

"You didn't exactly give me a phone number to reach you." He laughed. "Now come on, don't I get to come in?"

"Sure, but please be quiet right now. Ruby-Chan is still asleep." She said as she closed the door, opened the lock, and fully opened it to let Hikaru in.

"Nice place." He said as he walked in. "It's a little on the cheaper side though."

"I know." Ai said. "Unfortunately, I still am not making a lot, so I have to do with what I can get." She said as he went past her, leaving her to close the door.

Aqua saw the strange man who just walked in. Aqua didn't know who he was, but clearly, he was someone that knew Ai. Aqua wondered exactly who he was, but if he knew Ai it didn't seem like much of an issue.

"Oh, is this one of mine?" Hikaru asked.

One of his? Does he mean-

"Of course." Ai said in a deadpanned glare. "Who else would he be? I don't have any other kids you know." She said in an offended tone.

"Sorry." Hikaru laughed at her offense. "I didn't mean it like that. I'm just amazed at seeing my own kid."

Ai raised a brow but kept quiet about it. If he wanted to see Aqua earlier, he should have said so years ago when they were born. But Ai kept her mouth closed and simply accepted the apology.

"Don't be scared." Hikaru kneeled down to Aqua. "I'm Hikaru, I'm your dad."

Aqua wasn't scared. No, he was completely shocked. The son of a bitch who wanted to kill Ai was standing right in front of him. Standing right here, like a wolf in sheep's clothing, and Aqua had no plan.

He thought he'd have more time. He thought he'd at least have a few months before his father tried to contact Ai or meet them. He honestly thought he was going to have to figure out who he was and find him. But instead, the man just walks up to him, right through the front door, and introduces himself. Any plan Aqua was forming was now out the window, since the man who wanted Ai dead was now in a perfect opportunity to kill her.

Aqua considered his options. He would not be able to fight the man, Hikaru, he said his name was. Even if Aqua somehow got a weapon like a knife or a blunt object, he doubted that he'd be able to do more than give the man a cut or bruise. He couldn't even reach his vital areas with the massive height difference. So, using any kind of physical force on him was useless if he decided to attack Ai now.

He could try to contact the police if something happened. But in the time it would take them to respond, Ai would likely be long dead. Him and Ruby too since they would be witnesses. Aqua had no doubt that Hikaru would kill them too, since in his two attempts to kill Ai would have resulted in their deaths as well.

"Are you ok kid?" Hikaru asked. Aqua was now aware that he was silent.

"It's ok Aqua-Chan." Ai soothed. "This is your father, Kamiki Hikaru." She tried to say.

"He's not saying anything." Hikaru said.

"Give him a moment, this is a lot to put on a child." Ai said.

Aqua had to will himself to say or do something. He needed a plan now. He needed to think of something to give himself an advantage over Hikaru. Maybe, if Hikaru was trying to form a relationship with him, he could use that to his advantage. He could kill Hikaru before he had a chance to hurt Ai if his guard was down.

Wait till he's asleep and put a knife in his neck? No, that won't work. No one would believe a four-year-old killed a full-grown man. The obvious suspect would be Ai, especially since he'd have to use one of her kitchen knives.

A syringe full of air? It would be harder to trace, but he'd be unable to actually even get a syringe. What would a four-year-old need one for anyway? Also, Ai would refuse to let him use any kind of sharp objects. It also still had the issue of having all blame put on Ai if foul play was suspected.

Aqua was fine with prison or death, but he refused to have Ai get sentenced.

"Mama?" Ruby said as she walked into the main room. "Who's that?" She asked, looking at the strange blonde-haired man.

"Ruby-Chan." She greeted. "This man here is Kamiki Hikaru, he's your father." Ai explained.

"My father?" She asked.

"Yea, that's me." Hikaru said. "You look so big and cute. You look a lot like your mama." He laughed.

"Minus the hair color." Ai laughed as well.

Ruby went up to Hikaru hesitantly, unsure of how to take the news. She obviously knew that Ai had to have had a relationship in order to give birth to her and Aqua, but it was so weird meeting him.

"Well, we don't need a papa." Ruby said with a scowl. "All we need is mama."

Ruby had no idea of the danger that Hikaru posed to the family. Instead, she just felt jealous of Ai's time. She was worried that if Hikaru came back into their lives, then she'd have to stay with him instead of staying with Ai. She really didn't want to get to know this man if it meant sacrificing her time with Ai.

"Ruby-Chan, he wanted to meet you. Shouldn't you give him a chance?" Ai tried to explain.

"No!" Ruby yelled as she ran over to Ai and placed herself between Ai and Hikaru. "We don't need you!" She yelled.

Ruby stood between Hikaru and Ai, placing her hands out in front as if she was shielding Ai from the man. At least Ruby was hesitant of the man, although for different reasons than Aqua was.

Hikaru laughed a bit as he walked up to Ruby. He knelt down in front of her, getting down to about her eye level, and flashing her a warm and loving smile. Ruby's composure broke a little bit, clearly confused and yet entranced by his warm smile.

"It's ok Ruby-Chan." He smiled lovingly. "I have no intention of taking you away from your mama or getting between you two."

"But-" Ruby tried to argue.

"I know I haven't been in your life up until now, and I don't expect you to just accept me out of nowhere. But I want you to know that I think you're every bit like your mother and I want to try and add to your life. If you'll let me."

Ruby was conflicted as her supposed father tried to reason with her. She obviously had no connection to Hikaru. After all, she had vague memories about her real father, the father she had when she was Sarina. This man seemed genuine, but she also had bad feelings about him since he left Ai in the first place. If he was such a great father, then why abandon his kids? It reminded Ruby of her previous parents.

However, he did seem genuine about wanting to create a new life with them. She wondered what she should do.

"Ruby-Chan." Ai began. "Why don't you give Hikaru a chance, to let him show you that he can be just as loving as me."

"I-I don't know." Ruby stuttered.

"Please take your time Ruby-Chan." He smiled. "I want you to want to get to know me, not be compelled to. So, if you decide to spend time with me, it will be your choice."

Ruby lowered her arms, accepting the olive branch as it stood.

"Ok." Ruby said. "I'll give you a chance, but that's all." She said.

"No!" Aqua screamed, getting between his new family and the man who wanted them dead.

"Aqua-Chan." Ai said.

"He can't just come in and pretended to get back in our lives." Aqua grasped at straws, hoping to prevent Ruby from having any alone time with the killer.

"Right now, it's just to get to know you. That's all." She said.

"I don't care!" He yelled. "I don't want this fucking man in our house!"

Perhaps it was smarter to try and create a positive relationship with Hikaru in order to try and find a way to kill him. However, if he tried to get either Ai or Ruby alone with him, there's no telling what could happen. How easy would it be to make their deaths look like an accident? He'd be questioned and investigated, but he could just as easily deflect those questions or find a way to conceal any evidence of wrong doings.

He had to resort to using his childish fears to his advantage. If he can convince Ai to completely cut Hikaru out of their lives, it would at least prevent any private meetings between them and avoid her death.

"Aqua-Chan." Ai said sadly.

"It's ok Ai-Chan." Hikaru waved off. "He's made it clear that he doesn't want me here. I can understand." He smiled lovingly again.

Aqua noticed that Ai blushed at the smile, no doubt still having lingering feelings for him.

"Please forgive him, there was an incident recently." She said.

"Oh?" Hikaru asked. "What happened?"

"Someone, an obsessed fan broke into the apartment and tried to hurt us. They're still a bit sensitive." She explained.

"Oh no." Hikaru said in what appeared to be legitimate surprise. "Is that why there's bruising on his neck?" He pointed to the faded yet still visible bruise on Aqua's neck.

"Yes." Ai said sadly.

"It's not every day that you almost get stabbed, so I can understand that he's sensitive." Hikaru said.

Aqua widened his eyes slightly at those words. Any doubts he had of Hikaru's involvement was now gone. Ai never mentioned that Ryosuke had a knife, nor that it was pointed at him. The only way that Hikaru would know that is if he either knew about how Ryosuke would attack, or he was watching the scene unfold from a distance.

It was a mistake on Hikaru's fault, however it was such a minor slip that Aqua doubted that Ai or Ruby would notice. Even if they did, there's no way that they'd believe that he was involved.

"How'd you all survive unharmed?" He asked.

"That was Eren-San!" Ruby yelled.

"Eren-San?" Hikaru asked.

"She means our neighbor." Ai said. "He's a westerner that fought the stalker off."

"Yea, he was awesome!" Ruby said in excitement. "He... well, I didn't really see it since I was behind mama. But I'm sure he was cool."

"Really?" Hikaru said. "He sounds like an amazing man."

"Yea, he should be her bodyguard and beat up any bad stalkers!" Ruby cheered.

"You know President Saitou would never let that happen." Ai laughed. "Even if we could afford private security."

"He should do it for free." Ruby said. "There is no greater honor than dying to protect an idol as great as you mama. Everyone should offer their lives so you can be successful."

"R-right..." Ai had no response.

When did her daughter become such an obsessed little otaku? It was cute though, especially since she had such an odd imagination.

"I need to make breakfast." Ai said. "You're welcome to stay."

"Ai!" Aqua yelled.

"Aqua, he is a guest." She raised her voice slightly, showing a side of her motherly persona that he rarely saw, that being her correcting him. "We can't be rude to guests."

Aqua had no way to counter that. At least no way that she would believe.

"Hey, the father of your kids tried to have you killed Ai. You should kick him out or call the police."

Yea... that wouldn't work.

Ruby went over to the couch to wait for food, while Aqua went over to the table so he could be within earshot of Ai and Hikaru. He needed to hear what they were saying so he can plan.

"There's... actually another reason I came here Ai-Chan." Hikaru said as he walked closer to Ai.

"W-what?" Ai asked, getting a bit uncomfortable but still blushing at the forwardness.

"Well, you see, in the past few years we have been apart, I realized that I have grown fond of you. Even more than when we were kids." He said, getting well into Ai's personal space.

"H-Hikaru." Ai stuttered as she blushed.

"I know I wasn't the best man at the time, but I have missed you dearly." He was close enough that Ai felt his breath on her face.

Ai blushed and looked down, trying not to show how much of an affect he was having on her.

"I realized that you were the best thing that ever happened to me." He said as he gently placed his hand under her chin and raised her head up. Ai was almost forced to look him right in the eye, and she blushed even more. "I know I said and... did things that I regret. But I want you to know that I always adored you. I wanted you to give me another chance. I know you thought about it too."

Those eyes. That confidence. That sweet and warm smile that always made Ai melt. Hikaru always knew exactly what she was thinking and knew exactly how to make her swoon over him. It was what attracted her to him to begin with. How his eyes just showed confidence and self-assurance in every action he took. How he spoke with such softness and care to make her feel like she was that only person who mattered to him.

Ai could see herself falling in love over again with him. She could imagine reliving those few weeks that they spent together. How happy and loved she felt. To have the feeling of being treated like a woman again, and not an idol or a girl.

But behind those soft and gentle eyes, was something that Hikaru hid from the world.

"I'm sorry Kamiki-San." Ai took his hand off her chin and gently guided them down.

She continued to hold his hand as she stared down at it. Those soft and gentle hands that at times would become hard and violent.

"Kamiki-San?" Hikaru asked, noticing her using his family name as if they were strangers.

"I know that if I let myself, I could fall for you so easily." She said. "But even then, what was between us is over now. It was a few weeks of time we spent together after almost two decades of our life. I can understand that you said you changed, but even then, you'd never be the man who I once cared for." Ai said, intentionally avoiding any mention of the word love.

"Ai-Chan." Hikaru said sadly.

"Even then, it wouldn't be right to deprive you of a chance to meet your kids. So I'll remain respectful to you and do what I can to make sure that our kids give you a chance to see the wonderful man you became. But I can't fall for you a second time. Please forgive me." She explained.

Aqua was already slipping around them as they were distracted in order to reach the front door. He noticed that Hikaru looked mad for a second. Mad at the rejection Ai gave him. Maybe that was why he tried to have her killed. Was he obsessive over her? A scorned lover that would rather see her dead than happy with someone else? Or was he a psychopath that had no empathy or emotions. Maybe he wanted her alone so he could get her killed.

It would certainly explain his amazing acting talents and social charm. Many psychopaths are able to create this front of being charming and trustworthy before striking.

Either way, time to use Eren for the one thing he actually tolerated him for. Protecting Ai.

While they were busy with his attempt to get her back, Aqua slipped outside without making a sound. He ran over to Eren's door and quickly knocked on the door. After a few moments, Eren didn't answer. Was he at work? Was he off doing errands? That simply wouldn't do. He needed someone who can fight now damn it!

" *Hello?* " He asked in English, looking down at Aqua. " *What do you want?* " Eren asked.

Eren's hair was a mess and his eyes had dark circles under them. Clearly, he was just woken up.

"Eto..." Shit! Aqua didn't know English.

Well, he did, but no one knew he knows English. How the hell is he going to let Eren know without revealing his actual English abilities?

Ai only started English lessons with them this week. Not nearly enough time to explain a grasp of the language.

" *Guy.* " Aqua said in an intentionally broken accent. " *Bada guy, home, danger.* " He mimicked. It would make sense for him to at least know some words.

Thankfully, Eren understood. He reached behind him to grab a folded knife that he had and put it in his jeans pocket. He slipped his boots on, though didn't tie them. He only had a red shirt that Ai bought him, so he didn't have much as he rushed out to Ai's apartment.

Why did he have a folded knife? A switchblade is illegal in Japan. He gets that western countries can allow for it, but that just added to the suspicion. Damn it, if Eren wasn't useful right now he'd be working to get Eren away from Ai.

Eren stepped inside of Ai's apartment and kept his hand near his back pocket in case he needed to draw the knife. Inside however, he was surprised to see Ai standing with another man, holding his hand as they talked.

"E-Eren?" Ai asked.

" *Ai.* " He nodded.

"W-what are you doing here?" She asked in Japanese.

" *I don't know what you said.* " Eren said as Ai mentally slapped herself again. " *But your kid said there was a dangerous man here, is that him?* "

"Dangerous?" Hikaru asked. "Me?" He laughed as he let go of Ai's hand.

"Wait... Where's Aqua-Chan!?" Ai screamed, freaking out that her son wasn't in her immediate view.

"Here." Aqua said from behind Eren.

"Aqua!" Ai ran up to him, almost pushing Eren out of the way.

She scooped him in her arms, flashes of the attack hitting her when she realized that he went outside alone. Somewhere she'd be unable to react or do anything if he was attacked again.

"What did I tell you about running outside by yourself!?" She yelled as she held him.

" *Can someone please explain.* " Eren said calmly, though his patience was running thin.

" *What did Aqua-Chan say?* " Ai asked Eren.

" *Something about a dangerous man in your house, though his Eld-English was poor.* " Eren said, catching his mistake before speaking.

" *That would be me.* " Hikaru laughed.

Aqua was surprised at how good his English was. He almost sounded like a native English speaker.

" *You are?* " Eren asked.

" *Well, I'm his father.* " He said, pointing to Aqua. " *Notice the similarities?* " Eren did.

" *I thought you didn't have a husband.* " Eren said as he looked over to Ai.

" *I don't.* " Ai said quickly. " *We only dated for a few weeks, but, well, you know.* " Ai tried to explain.

" *We had sex and she got pregnant.* " Hikaru laughed.

"Not in front of the kids!" Ai switched to Japanese.

" *They won't know, even if they could speak English.* " Hikaru laughed, staying in English.

" *So, you're the dangerous man?* " Eren asked.

" *I'm not surprised he reacted that way.* " Hikaru laughed. " *This is the first time I'm meeting them, so I get it.* "

" *Sorry for barging in.* " Eren apologized, though more out of societal habit than a genuine apology.

Eren was actually kind of upset. He was sleeping after the job last night and his shoulder was in pain from having it dislocated. He could move it well enough, but the soreness and the headache just made the sudden call from the kid even worse.

But, he had to take it seriously since he wanted to make sure Ai was safe. He doesn't know why he felt that way, but he just did. He safety took priority in his mind.

" *Well, it's ok. I'm glad I get to meet the man who saved my kids and ex-girlfriend.* " He laughed. " *What's your name again?* " He asked.

" *Eren Yeager.* " Eren said.

" *Yeager?* " Hikaru tried the last name out. " *Sprechen Sie Deutsch?* "

Eren stared at him.

" *Guess not, though I'm not surprised. Where are you from?* " Hikaru asked.

Eren stared at him again, not wanting to engage in conversation with the stranger. Mostly, he didn't have the energy after what happened last night with the ambush. Hikaru glanced around towards Eren's backside.

" *I see a blue passport sticking out of your back pocket, American?* " He tried.

" *Wait, you have your passport with you?* " Ai asked.

Ai looked around at Eren's back pocket, noticing that there was the classic blue passport that Americans would typically carry sticking out of his pocket. Though she only saw a bit of it and couldn't tell anything else. She really wanted to know more about Eren, and this was the perfect opportunity.

" *I'm not American.* " Eren said.

Eren held up the passport, which both Japanese citizens noticed was clearly not an American passport. Right under the symbol with Russian letters, was the English writing " *Ukraine Passport* ".

" *Awe man, I don't know any Russian at all.* " Hikaru said in mock sadness. " *I only know mostly western European languages, though French is my weakest.* "

" *You're from Ukraine?* " Ai asked.

" *What are you doing in Japan?* " Hikaru asked. Trying to escape the war?"

" *War?* " Ai asked. " *What war?* "

" *Man Ai-Chan, you need to read the news more often.* " Hikaru laughed. " *The invasion of Crimea a year or two ago. Is that where you're from?* " Hikaru turned to Eren.

" *Sure.* " Eren said simply, getting annoyed at this man asking so many personal questions.

Ai looked at Eren in surprise and sadness. A war? Eren was in a war? Or at least the victim of a war. Is that why he's so good at fighting and why he seems like something bad happened to him? Ai never watched international news, so it was a surprise for her to find

out that there was a war in Europe. She only knew of the war in the Middle East since America had been there for so long, but even then, she probably couldn't name any countries in the Middle East.

Is that how his mother died?

" I hope I'm not coming off as rude. " He laughed. *" I'm just glad to meet the man who defended Ai-Chan and my family. "* He smiled. *" She said you fought him off, do you know how to fight? "*

" I know a few moves. " Eren said.

" What discipline do you study? " Hikaru asked.

" A mix of things. " Eren shrugged.

" Ah, a fellow Mixed Martial Arts enthusiast. That's pretty cool. " He said. *" I actually go to an MMA club nearby; you should come over for a spar sometime. "*

" Not really interested. " Eren said.

" Oh, come on, it'll be fun. " Hikaru said. *" It'll be a light spar, maybe sixty percent intensity. Nothing to cause injury. "*

" It does sound pretty fun Eren. " Ai smiled. *" We could come to and cheer you guys on. "*

" I'm really not- "

" Too bad. " Ai said, dismissing Eren. *" I'll drag you there too. It'll be fun. "*

" Sure. " Eren sighed. *" If you demand it. "* As annoying as Ai could be sometimes, Eren did find her to be cute sometimes. Especially when she made up her mind.

"What do you think Aqua-Chan?" She turned to her son, who was still in her arms. "Do you want to see Eren-San and Kamiki-San

spar?"

"Sure." Aqua sighed in defeat.

"Do you have to call me Kamiki-San to our son?" Hikaru asked.

"Whoops." Ai bonked herself on the head. "I mean see Eren-San and papa spar?" Aqua refused to call him papa.

At least Eren would be there, so there's less chance of something going wrong or an attempt to be made on Ai's life. Even if Hikaru tried, Eren showed that he was skilled. A possible war veteran was a bonus. At least that somewhat explained some of the weird things about Eren, though Aqua still had his doubts.

Aqua came to a realization though. The reason why Hikaru decided to visit them and make himself known. At first, Aqua couldn't explain it. He knows for a fact that Hikaru wants Ai dead after his knife slip up, but now he knows why he's here.

Hikaru is gathering information. He's trying to find out why his plan went wrong a second time and deciding how best to proceed. That's why he's asking so many questions about Eren and wanting to spar with him. He wants to see if he's able to defeat Eren if it came down to a fight. He is also trying to get close to Ai and use them as a way to get her alone so that he can kill her in private.

Killers often try to do more direct approaches when they fail an attack. He's likely trying to actually do the job himself now, so he's going to try and get Ai alone. However, he also wants to see if Eren is going to be a threat and if he should deal with Eren.

That's why he tried to get back with Ai. He wanted to try and push Eren away from her so that she would be unprotected. After all, if they were dating, Eren likely wouldn't be in the picture. Luckily, Ai turned him down.

"Well, I should leave." Hikaru said.

"But I thought you'd stay for breakfast." Ai called out.

"I have to go; I have a lot to do." He waved off.

Aqua assumed he got what he needed for now and had no interest in staying.

" I'll see you later Eren. Still looking forward to that spar. " He smiled.

" Sure. " Eren shrugged, uninterested.

" What about you Eren? " Ai asked. "Want to stay for breakfast?"

" I'm meeting my boss for a job today. " Eren said.

" Oh, ok then. " She said sadly as he too left.

When the door was shut, Ai breathed a long sigh after the little scare today. She was worried Eren was going to hurt Hikaru after what Aqua said.

Speaking of which.

"You're grounded." Ai said.

"For what?" Aqua asked.

"For lying to Eren-San and going outside without permission." She glared at him, though to Aqua it had very little effect since he was technically an adult.

While Ai was cooking breakfast and preparing for it, Aqua started to think about his plan moving forward.

Hikaru made an information gathering move. He wanted to see what Eren was like and if Ai has any other things protecting her. Aqua will need to find a way to counteract this threat. Hikaru seems like he's now willing to do the deed himself if necessary. Which means that Aqua will have to find a way to deal with him in person.

Killing Hikaru himself is out of the question. Any plan he comes up with would likely risk Ai going to prison since he can't exactly explain how a four-year-old murdered a man. So, he can't directly attack or fight Hikaru, especially if anything goes wrong, he won't be able to overpower the full-grown man.

So he'd have to rely entirely on Eren. Eren was likely at least familiar with conflict, if it does turn out that he was from Crimea. It's still suspicious to Aqua, but he'd forgive it for now. However, if it's true that he does have some experience fighting, then at least that means he'll be able to protect Ai.

He also has to ensure that Ruby and Ai never go out alone with Hikaru. Any time that either of them are separated from Eren can risk Hikaru making his move. It would be easy for him to kill them and make it look like an accident. Either have them fall from a high height or have them fall into incoming traffic. As long as no CCTV cameras catch him, he can explain it off.

He wondered if he should tell Ruby about the situation, but decided not to. Ruby can't keep a secret and would probably try to do things herself and reveal too much. So he had to keep it hidden from his sister.

Ai on the other hand, he needed to find a way to let her know how much he disapproves of Hikaru. The only issue is that from her perspective, she is right that they should try to form a bond. Hikaru was his father after all, and Ai wants him to have a good relationship with his father. So, he needs to figure out a way to really sell it that he wants nothing to do with Hikaru.

That's when he came up with a good idea. He's four, which means he has one advantage that no one else does. He blushed when he knew what he would have to say to Ai.

After breakfast, Ai went to get changed so she could prepare for rehearsals today. Miyako was going to watch the kids so she would be able to focus on the rehearsal entirely. For now, she dressed in a

pair of black slacks, a V-neck shirt, and a beige suit jacket that she left unbuttoned. She packed a small bag with workout clothes so she could move when she arrived, plus her dancing heels that she used to practice.

"Oh, Aqua-Chan!" Ai jumped as she saw Aqua come into the room. "You shouldn't come in without knocking, mama was getting changed." She laughed.

Aqua was quiet, more so than normal. She was worried about what he was thinking since he met Hikaru. She expected him to be a bit put off by the news, but at the same time, she didn't expect him to react so aggressively to her ex. It was like he really distrusted Hikaru, which didn't make sense to her.

However, he was four, so it made sense that his emotions were random.

"Are you ok baby?" She asked as she walked over and knelt down in front of him.

Aqua looked down, not meeting her gaze, even though she was at his level. His bangs partially obscured his eyes, but she could see he kept his gaze down towards the ground. He looked so sad and hurt right now and she didn't know why.

Suddenly, Aqua charged into her, reaching around as much as his tiny arms could over her shoulders as he gave her a hard hug. The jump almost made her fall over, but she caught herself and wrapped her arms around him, as if on instinct. He felt so tiny and vulnerable in her arms, like he was ready to break apart at the slightest bit of pressure. His tiny frame felt fragile as she held him.

"W-what's wrong Aqua-Chan?" She tried again, worried that something was wrong with him.

"Please don't let him come near us mama." Ai widened her eyes as he said the one word she never thought he'd say.

He called her mama, not Ai or anything else. He said the word that she hoped he'd say since the moment he first opened his eyes. Not once did she ever think he would actually say that word.

She felt him tremble, as if he was crying or scared. Her heart broke and she had to will herself not to start crying. Her baby boy was terrified.

She wished to hear that word on better circumstances, but he chose now of all times to use it. She mentally kicked herself for not seeing what was wrong earlier. The last time a strange man came to their home, he had a knife to his throat. She traced the back of his neck with her finger, still seeing the bruising that was almost fully healed.

"I don't want that man near us, or to ever see us again mama." He said, his voice wavering as he did so.

"He won't hurt us Aqua-Chan." Ai tried to reassure him by patting his back. "He's your father."

"I know he hurt you before mama." He said.

Ai was taken by complete surprise. How did he know? Was he just that smart? She noticed that he always listened intently to every conversation she had, as if he was trying to find something. Was he really able to piece it together that Hikaru was not as sweet as his outward appearance would show?

"Kamiki-San... yes, he did things that I know he regrets." She said, truly believing him when he said that he changed.

"Then I don't want him here." Aqua said as he clutched a little harder.

His arms felt so weak, and he seemed so vulnerable right now.

"But that's in the past Aqua-Chan. People change as they get older." She said.

"I don't want him here." Aqua said again.

He let go of Ai as he stood back. Ai put a hand lovingly on his cheek as she stared into her son's eyes. His eyes were squinting, as if he was trying to hold back the tears that threatened to spill out. She even saw some tears about to leak out. His face looked so sad and scared. Ai didn't think she ever saw her son so vulnerable and scared.

"Please mama." He said, his voice now breaking. "Please at least let Eren-San stay with us when he's around."

Eren? How did he factor into this?

Oh, of course. Eren saved their lives. Hers, Ruby's, and Aqua's. Aqua probably sees Eren as a kind of guardian or protector. It's no surprise that he would.

"Ok, we'll make sure he's with us when your father is around." Ai said. "At least until you can learn to trust him."

She didn't have the heart to say no to his little request after the fear and vulnerability he displayed.

"Promise?" He begged as he put his own hand on her cheek.

Especially when he does things like that. It'd be cute if he wasn't so vulnerable.

"Promise Aqua-Chan." She said as she put her hand on top of his head and gently rubbed it.

Aqua smiled a bit and hugged her one more time.

After they let go, Ai had to get her things and leave. Miyako and the President arrived, both to drop Miyako off and for President Saito to take her to rehearsal.

Aqua smiled to himself as she left, glad that if there was one advantage to being the son of Ai, was that he could easily manipulate her with a bit of clever crying.

He knew that she wouldn't be tricked into doing what he said if he didn't give her a good reason. Any bit of logic he used would be completely explained away and treated as a childish fear. However, he could use that to his advantage. His childish fear would be perfect for manipulating Ai, after all, there's rarely every any logic to a child's fear. She would do what he said for no other reason than to humor his child like reasons.

It wasn't perfect, but it at least gave him a way to keep Eren between Ai and Hikaru.

Not going to lie, this was fun to write. I hope the subtle POV changes weren't confusing, but I didn't want to put a line break for every single one. It would just look bad to me. This does mark the first chapter I ever wrote that doesn't have a single line break and still maintained 6,000 words lol.

I know a lot of people were thinking this would be a quick one and done with Hikaru, but where's the fun in that? Since he's also somewhat of an unknown still in the Manga, I decided to make him extremely intelligent and well educated. He knows he failed twice so now he's gathering information before striking again. This way, he can be more prepared, and he'll start doing it himself.

Anyway, hope you guys liked this chapter.

Eren Came for the Waves

Chapter 17: Eren Came for the Waves

"Ok, I think everything is ready." Ai said excitedly as she finished packing the various stuff for the beach in Miyako's car.

"Ichigo is picking up the rest of the girls in the company van." Miyako said. "But with all this, I doubt we'll be able to fit Eren."

"Eren said he has his own ride there." Ai said.

"Really?" Miyako asked.

"Yea, his boss will take him." Ai said.

Ai was dressed in a long white dress that covered her from her ankles to her wrists. Not only did she have to maintain her identity, she also had to ensure she didn't get a tan. She would only be able to have it off for a little bit so she could show Eren her bikini.

Miyako was dressed in a white button up shirt and jeans shorts, which were on top of her swimsuit. She had a bikini as well since she wanted to show off her body at the beach.

The kids had simple small swimsuits. Simple swimming trunks for Aqua and a cute one-piece suit for Ruby that had an integrated skirt.

"And time to go!" Ai said in excitement as she put on her wide brim sun hat and large sunglasses.

"Did we remember the sweaters?" Aqua asked Ai.

"Yup, just in case the weather changes." Ai said, since the water would be cold, and they needed to stay warm when they got out.

That was one of the downsides for going to the beach in the fall. However, they had no choice since summer was too dangerous for any members of B-Komachi to go to the beach since there were too many people. Even to private beaches, since it was possible for people to still wander on the privately rented property.

Ai never really had the opportunity to go to the beach and was excited. She always wanted to go, but between being an idol since twelve and her own rough upbringing, she had very few chances to even think about going. She was glad that Eren recommended the beach for a little get together, even if he was being a little etchi by wanting to see her in a swimsuit.

She blushed at the thought and get just a bit more excited.

Unlike normally, Ai got into the front seat of the car. Since the back of Miyako's car was so full of stuff, she struggled to fit not only Ai but the twins in the back. So, they had to find ways to make room. Ai was a bit upset since she always sat with her kids but didn't make a fuss about it either.

She lowered the visor in front of her and checked in the mirror. She wanted to double check her hair, which she spent the past half hour styling. Her bangs were the same, but it was in a ponytail since she never really had her hair in the style. Her hair did get a little messed up from the hat, so she took a second to smooth out the bangs of her hair with her fingers.

"You'll be fine Ai." Miyako said.

"What do you mean?" Ai asked.

"I mean you look fine, Eren will be very impressed." Miyako replied.

"T-that's not what's going on." Ai denied.

"Look, I still don't really like the guy, but he is still a guy." Miyako said. "He'll find you incredibly attractive, so don't you worry about it.

If he didn't find you attractive, he wouldn't have recommended the beach." She said.

"I'm just making sure my hair is good, nothing more." Ai continued to blush.

Aqua shook his head. She was still so shy about the idea of trying anything romantic with Eren. You'd think a woman with kids would be at least a little used to men, but he had to remind himself that she had one short relationship that ended poorly. A relationship that ended almost five years ago. She was clearly nervous about a new potential relationship, so she was trying everything to make sure she was pretty.

"Don't worry mama, he'll be really impressed." Ruby chimed in. "You always look amazing."

"Thank you, Ruby-Chan." Ai, smiled at her daughter through the mirror.

Ruby was also excited for the beach. She never got to go since she was hospitalized for a large part of her original life. She was also excited for Ai, since she wanted Ai to get to know Eren more.

Ruby really liked Eren. He was handsome, strong, a westerner, and protected them when they were in danger. She normally didn't like anyone new entering into their lives, such as their real father. Ruby was very possessive of the time she spent with Ai and didn't want to share any of that time with anyone. Eren was the only person she made an exception for, since without him, she wouldn't have this time now with Ai.

"Do you have anything fun planned with him?" Miyako asked.

"Yup!" Ai said excitedly. "I have an activity that we can do that I'm sure he'd enjoy."

"If you're sure." Miyako said. "Just remember, we need to make sure we arrive and set up before Eren gets there. When did he say he'd arrive again?"

"He said around 0900 AM." Ai replied.

"Good, we need to make sure you all are far enough away so whoever he's with doesn't recognize you all." Miyako said.

"No problem!" Ai held up a peace sign. "I'm sure we'll have everything set up before they arrive."

0821 AM

"You know I am not taxiing service, right?" Sergei asked.

"It's hardly out of the way." Eren said.

"It adds fifteen minutes to route, I could be getting fast food instead of driving you to beach." Sergei complained.

"I helped you well enough on that last job, so I don't care about that." Eren retorted.

Eren and Sergei just finished up a morning job delivering weapons to a warehouse that would be shipped to Latin America. The client started to get angry at the price of the movement, so Eren had to use force to deter him. Luckily, he didn't have to use his pistol.

"Only reason I'm helping is because you're too good of asset to lose." Sergei said.

"I really don't care." Eren said.

"Besides, warmth of good woman would help you, I think anyway." Sergei said.

"I just want to go to the sea." Eren said.

"It's not sea, it's ocean." Sergei said.

"Whatever you call it." Eren replied back.

"So, you're planning to go meet single mom at beach... dressed in that?" Sergei referenced what Eren was wearing.

"What's wrong with this?" Eren asked.

Eren was dressed in simple black slacks, his normal boots, and a white button up shirt. It was just a normal outfit, what was wrong with is?

"Didn't you get swim trunks?" Sergei asked.

"I guess not." Eren said.

He really didn't feel like getting ridiculed by Sergei for not knowing something basic again. What even were swim trunks? It sounded like some kind of underwater tree.

"Whatever, at least take shirt off in front of single mom. She'd like that." Sergei laughed.

Sergei drove Eren to the edge of the beach, right near a car and van that had people pulling stuff out. Eren looked at Sergei's vehicle clock and saw that the time was maybe about 0834 AM. Eren was starting to get used to the English symbols for numbers and was able to generally tell the time now. He still had no way of learning the actual written language, but at least he can recognize numbers now.

Eren arrived a bit earlier than he was planning since the job went by so well. He even had to leave his pistol at home and borrow one of Sergei's for the job since he didn't want to bring it out to the sea and potentially get it damaged or risk rusting if he didn't clean it properly. In the four years after reaching the sea, the Eldian Military learned just how bad salt water was for gun and other weapons with moving parts.

"I'll walk back home, so don't worry about getting me." Eren said as he got out of the car.

"Who are they?" Sergei asked.

"Friends of the single mom." Eren said vaguely.

"Wait a minute..." Sergei said as he eyed the young women closely.

It was kind of far away, so he couldn't tell at first. But there was no mistaking it, they were disguised but when all of them were together, he could instantly tell who they were.

"Single mom is Ai from B-Komachi!?" Sergei yelled.

"Yes?" Eren said, not sure why Sergei yelled that out.

"I knew she looked familiar but didn't put it together." Sergei said. "I can get autograph."

"Why would you want one of those?" Eren asked.

"Are you kidding me? I told you, big fan." Sergei said.

"I thought you were joking." Eren said.

"I grew up in Soviet Union, cute girls dancing is something we didn't have. Didn't even have TV." He said.

"So?" Eren said.

"When I first saw Japan media, I loved it. You have to introdu-"

"No." Eren said as he slammed the door.

Sergei took that as his cue to leave, so Eren started to walk over to Ai and her friends as he drove away. What was with Sergei? Was he obsessed too? He saw a lot of fans during the concert who just seemed obsessed over the girls. He never imagined Sergei to be the

same way. Eren found that to just be strange. Sergei was 30 years older than these women. If he was interested before, they'd be much younger.

Then again, the man was a criminal. Eren was kind of worried, but he honestly doubted that Sergei would try to harm the girls. After all, he was very business oriented and refused to take unnecessary risks. So Eren didn't expect him to be a danger, even if he was apparently a fan.

He noticed that they were now rushing to get everything out to the sand.

The area looked really nice. It was a small crescent shaped bay, no more than 100 yards across, which was surrounded by trees to hide the beach away. Apparently, Ai's boss had to rent this area, so they would be the only ones here.

"E-Eren." Ai stuttered as she walked over to Eren. "You got here early." She said.

"Yea, we avoided the other vehicles." Eren said.

"You mean traffic?" Ai asked.

"Yes." Eren said.

Ai was used to how weirdly Eren talked by now, and now that she had the context that his first language was probably Russian or something, now put away that red flag for good.

"Hey Eren!" Meimei greeted as she walked up to him.

"Hi Meme." Eren greeted back.

"Mei-Mei." Meimei said, saying her name slowly so he can get it. "It's not that hard, even for an English speaker."

All the other girls, to include Miyako, crowded Eren again. Aqua walked near the group as well, wanting to listen in on their conversations while Ruby went over to the beach with President Saitou.

"Nino is asking why you aren't wearing your swim trunks." Ai said, as she translated for her non-English speaking friend.

There was that word again, swim trunks. Eren remained silent, unsure of exactly what he should say.

"Those aren't common from where I'm from." He said after a bit of a pause.

"Seriously?" Miyako asked.

"Eren's actually from Ukraine." Ai explained. "I saw his passport."

Eren shrugged as the girls all looked at him with a bit of confusion.

"Ukraine?" Meimei asked.

"Yea, he said he's from Crimea." Ai explained.

Eren shrugged, preferring to let them come to their own conclusions instead of trying to explain himself and possibly missing some details.

"Is that why you're in Japan?" Meimei asked sadly. "Are you trying to escape the war?"

"War?" Miyako asked.

"Yea, the invasion of Crimea." Meimei said.

"Sure." Eren shrugged again.

It's better if they make assumptions, that way if he makes a mistake in his story, he can blame them for coming to the wrong conclusions.

After it was translated, suddenly the girls all got sad. Even Miyako looked sadly at Eren. It explained how strange Eren was, and why he was always so vague about everything. If he was a victim of war, then that would mean that he wouldn't want to talk about his experiences. Miyako looked around and knew that the other girls felt the same. That was why he was always so vague and probably didn't fully understand modern things.

Especially if he was from a rural area. Eastern European countries didn't have the same standard of living as the rest of the world. So if he was from a rural area in a war torn country, it now made perfect sense why he seemed so lost and confused.

Aqua however, didn't fully believe that. He had his doubts since Hikaru mentioned it a few days ago. The rest of the girls probably didn't know this, but Japan had a very strict limit on who they take in instances of refugees. Especially from the other side of the world. With the Syrian Civil War, Japan only actually accepted maybe less than a dozen refugees this year. Japan had such strict policies on refugees that they always sent refugees to western nations or other nearby nations. What were the odds that a Ukrainian from Crimea would be accepted as a refugee?

Aqua grew suspicious of Eren again, and wondered if he had to find ways of investigating just who Eren was.

"Well, we'll get you swim trunks later." Ai said. "For now, let's set up. You can help me with the towel and umbrella." Ai said, bringing Eren with her.

Eren spent a few minutes helping Ai with the umbrella and laying the towel down. He felt the sun already start to warm him up, a strange kind of warmth compared to the chill of the autumn breeze. It was warm enough that he didn't need to get extra clothing to stay warm, but he knew from experience that the water would be cold.

Eren heard Ai shift behind him as he finished planting the umbrella into the sand. The other girls worked on their areas right next to

them.

"W-what the..." Eren said in shock as he turned around and faced Ai.

Why was she undressed!?

"W-what?" Ai asked as she noticed Eren blushing.

"Why are you in your underwear?" Eren asked.

"Underwear?" Meimei asked as she walked over to Ai.

Eren noticed she also took off her dress and was now walking around in her underwear. Come to think of it, everyone was now disrobed and walking in their underwear.

"It's a swimsuit you idiot." Miyako said.

"You have clothes specifically meant for swimming?" Eren cursed himself as he asked that question out of habit. He was too distracted from all the nearly naked women around him.

"Duh." Meimei said.

Ai giggled at how shy Eren was being. She never saw this side of him and it was actually kind of cute. He was acting like a child who saw his first swimsuit magazine.

Eren however, was just confused. He never met anyone who would swim for fun. The only people who spent time in the water were people who fished or took a boat across a river. Even when they reached the Sea four-years-ago, no one swam for fun. No one even knew how to swim until they were forced to train that skill since they would be crossing the sea and didn't want to risk overboard situations.

However, even when they trained in swimming, they did so in full equipment. Even fishermen who spent their lives on the rivers wore

extra stuff to stop from getting wet. Very rarely would they disrobe like this.

"Well, if you take your boots off, roll your pant legs, and take your shirt off, it'll look like swimwear." Meimei suggested.

Suddenly, Miyako remembered something.

"W-what do you mean" Miyako tried to say. "Foreigners always keep their shirts on." She said.

"We do?" Eren raised an eyebrow, confused on why she was stuttering.

"Well, this is Japan and that's weird." Ai said. "Besides, you need sunscreen on."

"Right, that weird paste." Eren said.

"It's best to get your whole upper body, so take your shirt off." Ai said.

Eren just shrugged and did what he was told. He unbuttoned the shirt and easily took it off.

" *Eto...* " Meimei said as her eyes went wide.

" *Kuso-* " Miyako whispered under her breath.

Eren was muscular. Even Aqua and Ruby gaped at how defined his muscles were. He was very lean, but very defined and clearly worked out. Every movement made his muscle flex naturally but still was clearly seen. And his abs were just... so very visible.

"So how does this work?" Eren asked.

Ai's face was completely red. She was horrified of going near him with how completely muscular he was. She was afraid of accidentally

touching him, since she knew she'd be able to feel how hard his body is.

"Show him Ai-Chan~" Meimei pushed Ai forward.

"Kyaa!" Ai screamed.

The sunscreen bottle that she clutched close to her with both hands suddenly popped open, a bit of sunscreen squiting out as the push took her by surprise. Some of it landed on Eren's chest. Eren just raised his eyebrow.

"So, what do I do?" He asked.

"J-just stay there." Ai stuttered. With a red face, she applied some on his chest and arms. "Now rub it in."

"Oh, what about his back?" Meimei grinned.

"I-I'll d-do that." Ai stuttered again.

Eren was very confused on what was going on. He suddenly felt like a piece of meat that was surrounded by a pack of hungry wolves. Did these women find his muscles that appealing? Everyone in the Scouts looked like this, even many of the women. So, he didn't see what the appeal was.

Then again, these women weren't Scouts. They were ordinary women. Since joining the Military, Eren never really met or spent time with normal people. Even in Marley, he kept to himself and only every talked with fellow Soldiers while in the Mid East. So, he guessed that it would be embarrassing to be rubbing this weird paste on his body. He also considered that they must never have seen a physique like his, since they only ever saw average people and not Soldiers.

Ai blushed as she worked up the courage to put the sunscreen on his back. She was completely amazed at how toned and hard his

back was. He looked like he only ever did pull ups since the moment he was born. She has never seen anyone who was this well-defined.

What if he held her with those arms? They'd probably be so strong. But then again, he would probably be uncomfortable to learn on or hug since he had so little fat. He may have a lot of muscle, but there was also bone showing, especially around his neck and upper shoulders.

As nice as his body was, she wondered if he had too much muscle.

"This is what I was afraid of." Miyako said to the girls in Japanese.

"When did you see him like this?" Watanabe asked.

"I saw him exercise outside of the apartment once." She said.

"Yea, I see why you said something. Ai is now physically hooked to him." Meimei whispered in agreement.

"He did like, forty pushups." Miyako said.

"F-forty?" Ari asked in surprise.

"Forty that Ichigo counted, he was going before and after he counted." Miyako clarified.

"My goodness. He's a monster." Nino said. "Ai got lucky."

"Right, a war refugee. What a lucky girl." Miyako shook her head.

"Yea." Nino sighed. "She's living my dream."

"Because he's a foreigner." Meimei said.

"Because he's a western foreigner." Nino corrected.

"Freaking Gaijin Hunter." Watanabe sighed.

"Come on, let's go look at the water." Ai said, taking Eren's hand as she dragged him over to the edge of the beach.

Ai stopped right as they reached the edge of the beach. Eren was slightly in front of her, as he looked out towards the Pacific Ocean. She turned around to the rest of the group that gave her a thumbs up. Ai blushed, since now she was going to talk with him away from the group while wearing a slightly revealing bikini.

She took a deep breath as she turned back towards Eren. Ready to start a bit of small talk and hopefully impress him with her swimsuit. She didn't go through that nightmare with Meimei for nothing.

"So-"

"Beautiful." Eren said in awe.

Ai blushed, any topic for small talk was completely gone from her mind as he just complimented her. She didn't know how she was going to follow that up. However, she willed herself to look him in the face and say something clever so that she wouldn't be too embarrassed.

When she did though, the blush faded.

Eren's eyes were completely fixated on the ocean, the morning sun just over the horizon as the light glittered off the waves. He didn't even glance at her. He was completely entranced by the ocean.

Ai agreed it was beautiful, but it was just the ocean. Something about the way he just stared at it made it seem like something more than it was. There was an almost childlike fascination in his eyes, as if there was such a deeper meaning about it that only made sense to him. Eren almost looked like a child with how amazed he was, his awestruck face made by something as innocent as the waves of the ocean.

Ai found it to be kind of cute, but also a bit disheartening. With the way his eyes looked, she didn't think anything could take his gaze away. She felt that if she stood in front of him, completely naked, offering her body to him and promising to let him do whatever he wanted, she still couldn't avert his eyes from the ocean.

Even then, she noticed a sadness in his eyes. Something that broke through the child like fascination and showed itself. As if, the thing that gave him the greatest joy in the world, also came with the greatest pain.

"I guess you do love the beach." Ai said.

"I had wanted to see it, ever since I was a kid." Eren said.

"Was this your first time?" Ai asked.

"No." Eren replied. "I saw it for the first time four years ago. But I heard about it when I was a child."

"So, you wanted to see it." Ai said.

"Yes." Eren replied. "A massive body of water, so big and so full of salt that merchants would never collect all of it."

"That's an interesting way to describe it." Ai said.

Ai was completely amazed at the way Eren's eyes just shined. It was probably a trick due to the sunlight hitting his eyes, but she could see such wonder and fascination there, barely concealing the sadness just below the surface.

"There were other things I wanted to see." Eren said.

"Like what?" Ai asked.

"Rivers of fire, fields of ice and sand, giant rocks that take days to climb." He recounted. "Whoever saw those sights, would be the freest person in the world."

"Did you see those things?" Ai asked.

"I saw the fields of sand, the Mid East." Eren said.

The Middle East? He traveled to the Middle East.

"What were you doing there?" Ai asked. "Were you a Soldier?"

"Yes." Eren said. "I crossed the sea and fought side by side with my enemy." He said vaguely.

Ai looked up information about Crimea and Russia when she found out that Eren was from there. She knew of the invasion of Crimea and knew that Russia considered Crimea to be part of their territory. She heard how Crimean citizens could be called to fight in the Russian Army, even if they were opposed to it. She also knew of Russia going to war in Syria.

Eren crossed the sea, probably the black sea, to fight with his enemy. He was probably a conscript in the Russian Army and was forced to fight in Syria. At least, that's what he assumed. Eren never specifically said anything about his past, but she understood why. He probably didn't want to relive those memories.

The Black Sea, something he wanted to go to for so long, only to be forced to cross it and fight for someone else's war. No wonder he always seemed so sad.

Ai reached down and took Eren's hand, giving it a small squeeze for reassurance. He seemed so conflicted right now, like he wasn't sure if he should be happy or sad. Ai never imagined that she would meet someone who was a victim of war. Japan was such a peaceful place.

She smiled as she looked out over the ocean. She wanted to take another look at it, tried to see the beauty through his eyes. Imagined what kind of impact it had on him. She could see that the ocean was very beautiful.

" She seriously didn't come up with a better idea? " Meimei asked.

" Nope, they've been sitting there for the past few hours. " Nino replied.

" We should have checked her plan. " Watanabe said.

After holding hands on the beach, which the girls thought was so cute from their perspective, Ai went back under the umbrella with Eren for a bit of fun activities. There were so many things they could have done, such as played volleyball, or wack the watermelon. Maybe even made a small lunch.

Instead, Ai decided that it would be the perfect time to begin teaching the illiterate Ukrainian how to read and write English.

Seriously, they're at a beach and that was the best idea she had!?

"Ai, a word." Meimei pulled her over as she pulled out the English books.

"What?" She asked as they were now far enough away so Eren couldn't hear them.

"You are seriously going to give him English lessons now?" Watanabe asked.

"Yea, he said he wanted to learn so I was going to help him." Ai said.

"That's nice, but isn't there a time and place for that kind of thing?" Meimei asked.

"Yea, like after dinner or something. Not now." Nino chimed in.

"Well, if I did that, we'd have a hard time trying to find the time." Ai said. "We're always busy with work."

"I know, but this is a beach!" Meimei shouted in a low voice. "You're supposed to do fun things. Games, things to work up a sweat, maybe even a bit of romantic kissing. Instead, you break out an English textbook like we're back on the schools roof? Should we get a Bento for you as well?"

"What's wrong with a bit of studying?" Ai asked.

"Do you really think he'd be interested!?" Meimei asked.

That's the thing they noticed, Eren was interested. From their vantage point, they could see his gentle and subtle smile as he learned from Ai. Even her kids were with them as they laughed and joked as they tried the different letters and sentence structures. She was even getting Eren to sing the ABCs, though he did so reluctantly and quietly out of what looked like a bit of embarrassment.

Eren wasn't incredibly vocal or expressive, but they did see his subtle smile as he learned. He seemed like he was really enjoying the time they were spending together.

" So, we're going to agree that Ai has failed successfully? " Nino asked.

" That's one way of putting it. " Ari said.

" Yea, he does seem invested. " Kyun said.

" Well, regardless, if it works for her, it works. " Meimei shrugged, though she had a small smile since she was glad that they were having a good time.

While the girls gossiped, Ichigo and his wife were enjoying the shaded tent as they ate small rice balls that they got from the convenient store. Ichigo noticed that his wife seemed to get a bit more affectionate lately, which wasn't something that he complained about.

" They seem to be getting along. " Miyako said.

" That's what I'm concerned about. " Ichigo said.

" I know you are; I am too. But she seems happy. He also saved her life, is it so bad to give him a chance? " She asked.

" Why are you switching sides now? " Ichigo asked.

" I'm not. " Miyako said. *" It's just, in the time I've spent caring for Ai's kids, I guess I kind of see them as my own kids. And if anything happened to them or Ai, I'd feel devastated. "* Miyako said.

" But they're not your kids. " Ichigo said.

" I know. " Miyako sighed. *" And I'm glad that Ai is ok, but I can't help but feel grateful that Eren was there. Even if I don't like him and think he's dangerous for Ai. "*

" Well, if you want kids so bad, we could always make some. " Ichigo smiled.

" Hmmm. " Miyako hummed in thought. *" That doesn't sound too bad. "* She smiled.

Even though she was promised a handsome young actor later on, Miyako slowly started caring less and less about that. Her husband was a stick in the mud, but in the time she cared for young Ruby and Aqua, she began to want children of her own.

Ichigo still took glances at Ai and Eren while they talked, still very concerned about the foreigner. Even more so when he wife just told him that he's probably a war refugee. Ichigo knew Japan's stance on refugees and how hard it is to get asylum in Japan. Especially a Ukrainian person, who should have been either sent north to the unoccupied part of Ukraine, or moved to places like Poland, Germany, or even Scandinavia. There should be no reason that a Ukrainian refugee should be here.

If Eren was in a war, it could spell disaster for his mental health. Ichigo knew a bit about international affairs since there was always the chance he'd have to go international with B-Komachi. He was worried that Eren could have a breakdown and do something to one of his idols, especially Ai.

He knew that for the past decade, there was massive civil unrest in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine, which led to pro-Russian and pro-Ukrainian protests that often turned violent. There was also the actual annexation of Crimea recently, which was an actual invasion. Either Eren was a victim of the war, or he was a Soldier fighting in it.

He had to find out information. That's why, while Eren and Ai were at the edge of the beach, he looked into Eren's stuff and found his passport. He quickly wrote down the Passport number in his notebook that kept all his business-related notes.

He rushed a bit since one of the girls almost caught him, but he got the number. As a president of a company, he had access to Government systems to run criminal background checks on any potential employee.

He was going to take Eren's Ukrainian Passport, run the number, and see just who Eren is. After all, he'll have his entire file since coming to Japan. Since Japan doesn't share databases with Ukraine, he can't learn about Eren prior to him coming to Japan.

Once he learns the truth, he will either tell Ai or confront Eren.

And there's the mandatory beach episode that most Anime's have lol.

It was fun to write, but a few things to mention.

AoT has a very realistic depiction of their world. There's no skimpy lingerie, no sexy swimsuits, nothing. If it's anything similar to renaissance era culture, the context of swimming for fun, or having

dedicated swimwear, didn't exist. So Eren wouldn't know what bikini's or swimwear is. Even if Marley is 1920s era timeframe, swimwear was full body covering. To Eren, swimsuits would look like underwear. Even more skimpy since underwear in his home would have a lot of covering.

If you also see what the girls wear when not in ODM gear, it's very conservative clothing that you'd expect in the renaissance. So Eren doesn't see very many women in such a state of undress. So, it would take him off guard lol.

I will kind of use that logic to fill in the blanks. Without spoiling anything, Eren is not dumb to romance either. He just would have a different opinion on it. You never see an actual courtship in AoT, so if it's similar to Renaissance period culture, Eren's idea of romance is meeting and getting married quickly. No one within the walls would date for any length of time. Dating would be quick.

At least, how I interpret it. Like I said, we never really see proper dating in AoT. So, Eren probably won't see the subtle signs of modern dating culture that Ai and the girls are throwing at him. Like I said, he's not dense, just has a different dating culture.

Anyway, hope that clears up some confusion.

Sergei is Training Eren

Chapter 18: Sergei is Training Eren

Eren stepped out of the car as Sergei pulled up to the abandoned warehouse in the industrial district. It was a different one from other warehouses that Sergei conducted his deals and businesses at. Inside was a bunch of plywood panels that were stood up straight to make walls and doors for a simple model of a house. Sergei called it a shoot house, which would be used for his training.

"Seriously, how many of these warehouses do you own?" Eren asked.

"I own a lot of property, but this one is friend of mines." Sergei replied.

"Another criminal?" Eren asked.

"No, he's honest businessman. But he doesn't mind letting me use place." Sergei said. "In Japan, you can get away with a lot of crime as long as it doesn't hurt people or cost government money. Police are very relaxed when it comes to organized crime."

"I remember that boss said something like that." Eren remembered.

" *Da*. " Sergei said. "Police allow organized crime, though they're getting upset recently due to gang war."

"You think it'll be an issue?" Eren asked.

"Initially, *Da* . But once they get things under control, everyone goes back to same old." Sergei said.

"So why bring me out here?" Eren asked.

"Well, after fun at beach you had yesterday, I figured I give you pointers so you can hopefully survive safe house attack." Sergei said.

"I know how to fight Sergei." Eren said.

"Even against overwhelming odds?" He asked.

"I've fought worse." Eren said.

"And you intend to use small pistol, no other weapons? What weapons do you intend to bring."

Eren was quiet when he said that. Eren felt that the pistol would be enough, but he did understand that Sergei was right and that he would need better and more effective weapons. He primarily used bolt action rifles while in the trenches, but occasionally he got his hands on the Slam-Shot gun that was recently developed by Marley. It was a gun that fired pellets instead of regular bullets.

Eren didn't remember the actual name, but in the trenches of the Mid East, they all just referred to it as a Slam-Shot since you have to pump the front grip to fire.

"So, you brought me to a range in the middle of the city, in a country that bans guns?" Eren asked. "Seems like a dumb idea. Why not go out into the countryside?" He asked.

"Don't be dumb, we have way to train. Good way too." Sergei said.

Sergei handed Eren one of those small fast firing guns. It was a bit bulky and had a large detachable magazine sticking out of the bottom.

"This is Airsoft Gun; it's modeled after the AKM Rifle." He said.

"Airsoft?" Eren asked.

"It shoots little BBs using compressed air. In close ranges, ballistics and accuracy are same as real gun. It is Gas Blow Back, so it operates almost exactly the same." He said.

"These are allowed?" Eren asked.

"Japan allows fake guns and is one of few countries that doesn't require an orange tip." Sergei said. "That orange tip is how you can tell it's a toy, before you decide not to ask."

Eren scowled, Sergei was used to how little he knew.

"I can train you in guns use, then teach you actual Close Quarters gun fights, then make sure you're armed enough for job." He said.

"So, we're training with a toy?" Eren asked.

"It's replica, not toy." He said. "Japanese Army sometimes use these to train their Soldiers. That way you can shoot each other without killing. Also, less expensive than what Americans use." He said.

"Fine." Eren said. "How does it work?"

Sergei went into depth on how the AKM worked, or at least the replica. Theoretically, it was the exact same as the real thing, with only minor differences since it's designed to fire BBs instead of bullets. The gas was housed in the magazine, which not only propelled the BB forward, but also pushed the bolt back. It had actual recoil and operated much the same way; however, the recoil was much less than a real gun.

"You use index finger to push safety down." Sergei said, as he demonstrated.

Sergei pushed the small lever on the right side of the gun all the way down with his finger, which allowed it to fire.

"One click down is full auto. Two clicks in Semi. Always use semi in close range fight. If you use full auto, you waste ammo." He said.

"Why?" Eren asked.

"AKM uses 7.62 ammo. It hits hard, though not as hard as real rifle 7.62. One or two shots kills most people." He said. "It's faster to fire two shots in semi than to go full auto and waste five bullets in target. You shoot target in chest, he dies, then go to next target."

"Where'd you learn that?" Eren asked.

"Back during Afghan war." Sergei said.

Eren never fought in close quarters like that. He fought in enemy trenches, which turned into chaos and almost always turned into bayonet and entrenching tool fights, or he used ODM gear and fought Titans. The only unique thing was fighting as a Titan, which basically was a hand-to-hand fight in every scenario.

"Make sure when you reload, you charge the handle. This isn't like new guns. Design was made in 1940s, the bolt won't lock to rear." He said.

Eren learned most of the basics. He learned how to reload the rifle, how to properly shoulder it, and how to aim with it. He noticed that it was a bit different than the Marly rifles he used, but much of the basics was still the same. The iron sights were even very similar.

"Now we'll move to room clearing." He said, once he felt that Eren was good enough.

"So basically, fighting room to room?" Eren asked.

" Da. " Sergei said. "Normally, you want a team to go in with you. You will be alone. Which means you're fucked."

"Thanks for the confidence." Eren said sarcastically.

"I'm being honest." Sergei said. "The worst thing that can happen is a man comes up on a blind side. You can only look and shoot one way. If he's on blindside, you're dead."

"Then I'll be careful." Eren said.

"No, you'll die." Sergei said. "But you'll need to learn anyway. For now, we'll see how you do. You stand at one end, I on the other, and we'll fight. Whoever shoots who first, wins." Sergei said.

"Fine." Eren said.

"Make sure to use face protector." Sergei said as he handed Eren a mask with a glass shield for his eyes.

Sergei walked into the shoot house while Eren prepared his replica gun for the fight. He loaded the magazine that had 30 BBs loaded and racked the charging handle. He figured this would be relatively easy since he fought close quarters in a trench.

After a few minutes, Eren went into the shoot house and started looking for Sergei. Eren was confident in his abilities to defeat the older man. He knew he'd be able to shoot first.

Eren never had to fight in doors in this capacity. When fighting Titans, you only ever used ODM gear so you're never indoors when fighting. Even in the Mid East, most engagements were shooting people in no mans land or storming a trench, which again was easy since most of the time they had to resort to melee fighting.

PUSHT!

"Damn!" Eren yelled as he was shot.

The moment he walked into a room; he was shot by Sergei who hid in a corner. Eren wasn't expecting Sergei to be in the corner of the room and blind side him.

"See, blindsided." Sergei said.

"I didn't expect you to hide." Eren said.

"Expect unexpected." Sergei said.

Yea, Captain Levi would kill him if he saw that. Was Eren getting sloppy, or was he still completely unused to how this new world fought?

"When you came in, your gun was pointing up. You looked like you were ready to charge with a bayonet. You need to keep gun shouldered." He said as he demonstrated. "Every room, you check corners first since most enemies hide there. It's luck of the draw when alone since you can only check on corner at a time."

"I see." Eren said.

Eren recognized that Sergei was right. He wasn't used to this kind of close in fighting with guns that can fire rapidly. He knew he could close the distance before someone racked their bolt action rifle, but less confident with these automatic firing guns.

"It's better to use explosives." Sergei said. "You through grenade into room, either flash bang or frag. It either stuns or kills all in room."

"Flash bang?" Eren asked, needing to know what it was.

"Grenade that makes a lot of light and noise. Still dangerous if you're near it, but primarily blinds and deafens enemy. They become helpless, though you can still be killed by blind panic firing." Sergei explained.

"That makes sense." Eren said.

It made perfect sense to him, the easiest way to clear out a Mid-Eastern trench was to throw as many explosives and grenades in the trench before storming it. That's why most of their grenades had sticks, to give extra leverage and a further throw.

These grenades looked like small ovals.

"We'll go again, this time focus on proper room clearing."

Eren ran through the drill's multiple times. Sergei almost always beat him in these room clearing drills due to his own experience. Anytime Eren had the drop on Sergei was due more to luck than skill. Sergei laughed every time he caught Eren by surprise, but he emphasized how important it was to be fast and aggressive.

Sometimes, Sergei would use unique tactics in order to confuse Eren. Sometimes, he'd hide behind a couch or mock counter and let Eren pass by before shooting him in the back. It taught Eren to check every single hiding spot in a room in order to be as thorough as possible.

Eren knew his chances of winning were slim to none. As a young man, Eren would always suicidally charge into a fight. Even during the attack on Liberio, it was still somewhat suicidal. He went in basically blind and on the hope that not only did his letter reach his comrades, but that Armin came up with a good enough plan to survive.

Eren still was as suicidal as they come, his only main advantage at the time was the fact that he knew his own future memories. Now, he was once again entirely blind. Eren got good at adapting and reading situations as they developed, while at the same time staying levelheaded and not lashing out in anger.

But to win this fight, Eren had to find a way to even the odds.

"I'll need explosives if I'm going to take all of them out." Eren said after their most recent drill. "I also need a way to destroy walls and support pillars."

"I can get some RPGs and Semtex." Sergei said.

"What are those?" Eren asked.

"RPGs are long tubular rocket launchers, very effective for breaking structures." Sergei explained. "Semtex are plastic explosives, good for setting traps or demolition and breaching."

"Why give me so much?" Eren asked. "Those sound expensive."

"Honestly, it saves me money." Sergei said. "The more resources you have, the more of them you kill before you die. That's good for business since this gang tried to kill me. I'd rather throw away expensive weapons and explosives than die."

"Do you have any way I can practice on those?" Eren asked.

"No such luck kid." Sergei answered. "But I can get some YouTube videos playing, at least teach you a bit of Red Army tactics."

"You mentioned a Red Army before." Eren questioned.

"*Da.*" Sergei said. "The Red Army is the name of the Soviet Army, now just Russian Army. I served in it back in 80s during Soviet Afghan War."

"You mentioned that." Eren said. "You learned all this from that war?"

"No, actually." Sergei said. "I was conscript at the time; our training was very little. We were given gun and taught very little before being sent to fight."

"How'd you survive?" Eren asked.

"I don't know, God maybe." Sergei shrugged. "We would be used to soften enemy before real Army arrived. Most of this I learned after I left the Army from old Spetsnaz business partners. It's good skills for criminal as well as Soldier."

"How did you get into this life?" Eren asked.

"Later in war, I became an Officer. Eventually found myself as Logistics Officer." Sergei answered. "It's dead-end job and fall of Soviet Union created a lot of scape goats. I sold a lot of Army Depot weapons and vehicles before I had to flee. Then I developed my business."

"Why did you sell away resources?" Eren asked. "Seems like you got what you deserved for corruption."

"Soviet Union was very difficult beast. Everyone was corrupt." Sergei said. "In Soviet Union, you actually distrusted people who weren't corrupt. The Senior Officer who reported my corruption found himself with promotion to General after Yeltsin took power. He was even more corrupt than I was."

"I see." Eren said.

"It's seen as a necessary thing in old Soviet Union. You ruined other people's lives and career in order to advance. I did it, and my higher ups did it. I was just unfortunate to be a mid-level Officer when Soviet Union fell." He explained.

"I guess you could never find legitimate work because of that." Eren said.

"In New Russia which hunted me as a corrupt Officer, *Da*, I could never live there again legitimately." Sergei said.

"What about here?" Sergei asked.

"I'm as limited here." He said. "Russia shared criminal information with international world, so Japan will have me arrested and returned if I'm ever discovered."

"Why chose Japan?" Eren asked.

"Because Manga and cute girls." Sergei laughed.

"That's not the whole truth." Eren said.

"*Da*, you're right there." Sergei laughed again.

"But that's my sad story." Sergei said. "What about you? How was time with single mom? You excited to be with idol?"

"It was nice." Eren shrugged.

"Did you two make any moves on each other?" He asked.

"What moves?" Eren asked.

"What did you two do?" He asked.

"Nothing much, she taught me some English and that was about it." Eren said.

"So, after spending time with her, you don't want more?" He asked.

"What, like marriage?" Eren asked.

"You don't have to go that far right now." Sergei said.

"She's a good woman and deserves to be married to someone who will be good to her and her kids." Eren said.

"And that person isn't you?" Sergei asked.

"I'm probably not even going to survive my next fight." Eren said.

"She'd honestly be better off if she didn't even talk with me."

"So, you do care for her." Sergei said.

"Yea, in some ways I do." Eren said. "She's a good woman. But she doesn't deserve a life with me. Not after everything I've done."

"That's why you try to keep your distance?" Sergei asked.

"At first it was because she was annoying." Eren said with an annoyed look.

"Was she now?" Sergei laughed.

"She did that stupid idol act that comes off as completely disingenuous. She'd more interesting when she just acts normally."

Eren said.

"You know, most people would love that act." Sergei said.

"We both know I'm not most people." Eren said.

"True." Sergei said. "I don't want to overstep, but you should give relationship a chance with her. I can tell you care for her and she probably does too. Maybe it's not so bad to-"

"Let's continue with the drills." Eren said as he loaded a fresh Airsoft magazine.

"If that's what you want kid." Sergei said.

For the rest of the day, Eren and Sergei continued to run drills and watch videos on how to utilize the weapons and equipment that Eren would need for the upcoming attack on the safehouse.

Aqua passed by Ruby who was sitting kneeled down on the table while writing in her small pink journal. Ai got it for her when they started their English lessons a week ago so she could write down and practice it. She was busy trying to memorize what they learned in the past week.

"Hey Aqua, can you help me." She asked.

"What?" Aqua said.

"I wanted to try and practice some of my English. I need you to let me know how it is." She said.

"Ok, go ahead." Aqua said.

" *Gooda morningu. Whata is ur a name?* " She tried.

" *My name is Aqua.* " He replied. " *What is yours?* " He replied.

" *Mya names a Ruby. Tanks you fur asking.* " She said.

" *How is the weather?* " Aqua asked.

" *Weather isa crear, it is a good day.* " She tried.

"That's pretty good." Aqua told her. "But make sure you pronounce your Ls." He said.

"But it's so hard. Why does English have so many L sounds?" She asked.

"It's completely different and shares no similarities to Japanese, so it has unique sounds and structures." Aqua explained. "You'll learn."

Aqua was amazed at how fast Ruby was learning. She was able to start comprehending some sentences outside of basic memorization. He wondered if it was because she was still a child and was able to learn so fast. After less than two weeks, she has made amazing progress.

Aqua didn't know how their reincarnation worked exactly. Either they only had their former memories or there was more to it. Either way, Ruby seemed to benefit from her child like brain by retaining information more. Infants and toddlers typically learn languages faster than adults since their developing brain is able to soak up more information than an adult.

Aqua wondered how good she'll be since she's combining the experience of having older memories with the young brain of a toddler. He wondered if his brain would do the same, but he did slack off on studies since he saw this as kind of a break.

After finishing giving her a few pointers, Aqua stealth fully made his way to the front door and quietly opened it so he could get outside. He had a job to do and he hoped that Ai would remain asleep.

Sometimes, when Ai returned from a rehearsal, she would be completely exhausted and try to get a nap in during the day. It was extremely easy for her since Aqua and Ruby were both very well behaved and required minimal supervision. Aqua of course being 34 and Ruby probably being a teenager mentally after four years of being reborn.

It gave Aqua the perfect opportunity to break into Eren's room while he was gone and see if he can learn anything about him. While he appreciated Eren protecting Ai, and needed him to further protect her from Hikaru, Aqua needed more information on who the man was specifically. Eren could be dangerous, and he had to determine just how much of a liability he was to Ai's safety.

Which is why he needed to get inside, something that a bit of lockpicking would do. He wished he could say he's had experience lockpicking, but Aqua never had. Not as Goro or as Aqua. So he was very much going based off of what he could find on the internet.

While standing in front of Eren's door, he brought out the three things he carried with him.

The first was a small metal strip that was bent at a 90-degree angle on the end, similar to a flat Allen key. He fished it out of the trash and had to spend an hour trying to bend it to shape. Since his toddler muscles were so weak, he had to use a pair of pliers that Ai had and his whole weight in order to bend it.

The second item was a bobby pin that he took from Ai's room. It had the rubber piece taken off and had the tip bent slightly to make a hook like shape. It was very simple items that he had on hand from Ai.

Aqua lastly had Ai's cell phone, which would be the most important thing. He spent the last half hour watching a YouTube video on how to pick a lock. He found some channel that had a guy saying he was a former American Special Forces Soldier who went into detail on how to pick most lock and tumble security doors.

He opened the video and went back to the point where he would insert the lever, which was the metal strip that he bent. This is what would actually turn the lock, while the bobby pin acted as a scraper and pusher to push the tumblers into place.

It was simple in theory. All he had to do was keep pressure on the lever and push each pin up until each one caught, and it would allow him to open the lock. He was glad that unlike most Japanese homes, that used electronic locks, this apartment still used older lock and tumble styled bolts. So, it would be easy to sneak in.

The video said one effective thing to do was to do an initial scrape with the bobby pin. You scrape the tumblers so that you can get some of them locked before actually beginning the lockpicking. So, he scraped along the top.

Only for the lock to completely turn and open the door... how? Was it that easy? The video said sometimes that can happen, where they all catch and open the door. But he didn't expect it to be so freaking easy.

"Well, don't complain about good things." Aqua said to himself.

He slowly opened the door and turned on the lights. This was actually the first time he's been in Eren's room and understood why Ai would always complain about it. It was almost entirely empty, with no posters or anything that would make it more comfortable. Eren didn't have anything besides the one picture of Ai in a one piece suit that was signed by her.

It was clean though, very clean. Ai always made sure their room was clean, but there was only so much she could do. She made sure their apartment wasn't gross, but since she had two children, it did get messy occasionally and she'd have to reorganize. Eren's room was spotless.

Aqua even ran a finger on the underside of the kitchen counter and saw it was perfect. He wasn't sure if Eren was a germaphobe, but he

kept a very clean room. He guessed it made sense if Eren was a veteran, they tend to be very strict about cleanliness.

There was nothing out of the ordinary though. Nothing that showed that Eren as being either unusual or dangerous.

He noticed a small cardboard box, maybe as big as his palm, in the trash. Aqua fished it out and couldn't understand what it was. He noticed some English numbers, but everything was written in what he assumed was Russian. He guessed it wouldn't be odd for him to have something from home, so he ignored it and returned it to the trash can.

One thing he noticed though, was a small notebook that was on his dinner table. It looked like one of the ones that normally come with hotel rooms or even the apartment. Ai still had one that was on a side table in her room, but she never actually touched it since she used it more as decoration than anything else.

Aqua opened it up. On the first page was a list of numbers and next to them, symbols that he couldn't really tell. Some of the symbols looked similar to Roman Numerals, but it also looked different. Was Eren learning English numbers?

As he flipped through the pages, he saw what looked like a diary or journal. It was all written in an unfamiliar language. It didn't look familiar at all, it didn't even look similar to Russian or whatever language Ukraine uses. The letters in his writing looked strange, so he decided to try and see if he could figure out what language it was.

Aqua typed in a random sentence in Google translate, then he started to try and go through each language in order to see if he noticed anything similar. He picked the first language on Google translate and went down the line to see if he recognized anything. He noticed after maybe ten minutes that it didn't look familiar at all.

That wasn't surprising, Aqua was a doctor in his previous life, not a major in any form of language studies. So it would make sense that

he couldn't easily recognize it.

"I'll need someone who can actually translate this, or at least recognize it." He said to himself. "But I don't have a clue who can help me, not that I can ask at this stage in my life."

Aqua was still a toddler and no one would take his request seriously. Even if he found someone who could help him translate the book, no one would believe why he would want to learn it. Maybe he can do the whole "I'm curious" card, after all, it's normal for a child to be curious. But that would also bring up questions that he didn't want to answer.

Wait... there was one person he knew that was able to easily recognize most languages. Or at the very least, would have a much easier time doing the research than him. The person who he thought of not only was one of the best in the field of language studies, but also might be able to understand his situation, at least from a certain point of view.

However, did he really want to see that person again? No, he really didn't. But this person was one of the best that he knew of, maybe the best. With as prestigious a job as that person had, they would no doubt be able to at least help.

"Do I really want to go see her?" He asked himself.

She might be just as crazy as when he last saw her, but sadly, she might be the only one to believe this whole reincarnation thing. Something that still somewhat terrified him.

"Guess I have no choice." He said.

Aqua took out the phone and took some pictures of the journal, making sure to get as good a quality as possible so it can be easily read. He then went into the photo app of the phone and set the pictures to hidden, that way Ai didn't accidentally see them on her

phone. He never checks the hidden section anyway, especially since there are no hidden pictures besides the ones he just added.

Now he needed to get back before Ai woke up or Ruby noticed he was gone. She would rat him out if she knew he was breaking Ai's rules.

He placed the journal exactly where he found it and made sure it looked as undisturbed as possible. He then went to the door and did the same. Unfortunately, he wouldn't be able to relock the door from the outside, so Eren may be curious as to why his door was unlocked. Hopefully he thinks he just left it unlocked.

Aqua returned to Ai's apartment and stealth fully opened the door and closed it so Ruby wouldn't be disturbed. When he went back into the main room, he noticed she was still studying her English lessons. He went over to the TV and sat down to watch some shows.

Now he needed to find a way to meet that woman again. It wouldn't be easy, but he'd need to find a way.

After the drills, Eren sat down with Sergei as he went over some videos on the proper use of the Russian Grenades and RPG that he would use. Since there weren't any airsoft variants that Sergei had on hand, Eren would just have to do his best to memorize the instructions as best he could. The first time he'd use these things will be on the actual raid of the safehouse, so he'd need to ensure he is as knowledgeable as possible.

This almost reminded him of when they fought the Rod Riess Titan, where they came up with an improvised ODM styled barrel explosive set up without fully testing it. It worked then, mostly because Hanje and Armin were both far smarter than anyone on that wall.

"So, you're committed?" Sergei asked as they finished up for the day.

"Yes." Eren said.

"And there's no way for me to convince you otherwise?" He asked.

"No Sergei." Eren said.

"It's suicide." He said.

"I know." Eren said. "But I won't die, nor will I allow myself to be a pawn in a war."

"So, your answer is to charge to your death and be a pawn anyway?" Sergei questioned.

"I will fight on my terms." Eren said with determination. "I refuse to let those bastards control me. This job will be a statement."

"And what do you intend to state?" Sergei asked.

"That I am no one to be messed with." Eren said. "That if they cross me, they will lose. No matter how many people they send against me, they will lose."

"I don't doubt you'll do some damage on this, but you need to understand that you won't be the only one to suffer." He said.

"What do you mean?" Eren asked.

"Criminals who see threats they can't fight will find other ways." Sergei explained. "Criminals are resourceful and many lack morals or ethics to play fair in a fight. If they can't beat you through force, they'll find other ways."

"They can try." Eren said. "But they will fail then too. There is nothing that can stop me."

"Normally, I'd explain what ways they can get to you, but you'll be dead by the end of the week, so it's pointless." Sergei said.

"You don't have any trust in me, do you?" Eren asked.

"No, I don't." Sergei said. "No one would be able to take this job alone. No one. Fighting unfair odds like this is impossible. Not even a Special Forces Soldier could do something so crazy."

"Why do you care?" Eren asked.

"I guess I don't." Sergei shrugged. "You're a grown man and can make your own decisions. Even if you are young."

"I've seen things you couldn't imagine Sergei." Eren said.

"I don't doubt that you believe that." He said. "Even still, I'll be a bit sad to see someone as young as you die a needless death."

"Yet you're wasting resources to help me." Eren said.

"Not wasting." Sergei corrected. "I have no doubt you'll do damage before you die, and that can only help me. But I'll make sure to find you a good grave if I can get your body back."

"You'll see Sergei." Eren said. "You'll see exactly what I'm capable of."

After that talk, Sergei drove Eren back home to his apartment.

Once he got back to his door, he noticed that it was unlocked. Eren got concerned so he drew his pistol from his waistline and started to go through the small apartment in order to make sure there was no threats.

He saw that it was still empty and nothing was disturbed or missing. So he assumed he either forgot to lock the door or made a mistake when turning the key. He berated himself for being so careless, but he decided to let it go and would make sure to lock the door in the future.

Eren laid down on his Futon and closed his eyes. He would continue to train with Sergei until the boss contacted him, at which point he would finalize his plans on destroying the safehouse.

Eren was going to make his skills officially known to the Yakuza world, that much he promised.

And we're getting ready for the big fight.

For Eren's skill, I have no doubt he'd be good in most fights. However, between ODM training and what I'd assume is WW1 styled training (Depending on how much quality training the Marlyan conscripts got), he wouldn't know modern CQB or room clearing tactics. He'd be lacking in those skills, but he'd be able to get good at it relatively quickly.

As for the person Aqua mentioned, it's not any established character lol. It'll be a new character; however, I will say that the location will be well known. No spoilers lol. However, that won't happen for another 2-3 chapters. First, we need to deal with the safehouse plotline lol.

Anyway, thanks again for the reviews and the criticism. It really helps and I encourage you guys to keep it up lol. Hope you guys enjoyed.

Assault on the Safehouse

Chapter 19: Assault on the Safehouse

Wednesday Night

"Here we are kid." Sergei said as he pulled up to the street next to the safehouse.

"Thanks for the ride, Sergei." Eren said as he opened the door.

"Listen kid." Sergei called out before Eren left.

"What?" Eren asked.

"I hate to see you throw your life like this, and I'd rather you abandon this suicide mission and just go back to your apartment." He said.

"But I get that you are completely set on dying this way, but I was glad to have worked with you. You made life for me much easier and even when you die you'll make things easier."

"You're welcome." Eren shrugged.

"But at least make sure this is the fate you want." Sergei said. "If you intend to die in a blaze of glory, so be it. But you should consider that people will miss you."

"I won't die Sergei." Eren said. "Even if I do, I'll die fighting. But I won't let myself die. I refuse."

"So, you're going to just keep living for the sake of living?" Sergei asked. "You think that will keep you alive?"

"I won't ever lose this gift of mine. I have a right to live in this world." Eren said with determination. "And I refuse to let someone else dictate my life."

"Sounds boring." Sergei said.

"Boring?" Eren asked.

"What's the point in living just to live?" Sergei asked. "Maybe that's why you are so reckless. You have nothing to live for, except to keep breathing."

"Goodbye Sergei." Eren said as he closed the door, leaving the man and his philosophies to himself.

Sergei drove away from Eren, intending to get far from the fight that was about to happen.

Eren was right across the street of the Nakano safehouse. It was a small warehouse situated on the dock near the Yokosuka port, which was south of Tokyo along the coast. It was on the edge of a small inlet right at the mouth of the Tokyo Bay. There were a few large ships that were either transporting cargo or cruise ships that transported people. There was a single Japanese Navy ship, based on the information Sergei gave him, however the ship was too far to react to anything Eren had planned.

Eren stayed a bit of a distance. He saw that the warehouse itself was surrounded by a simple chain link fence with barbed wires on the top. Inside was a few shipping containers and Nakano Yakuza guards patrolling the area. From his vantage point, he saw that the outside guards were unarmed, at least visually. He had no doubt that they had concealed handguns since they couldn't be seen visibly armed in public.

Although it was dark, there were lights on the roof of the warehouse that shined down in order to illuminate the area. It would be difficult for Eren to sneak in, so he would have to move with speed and aggression, much in the way that Sergei taught him.

Eren went over his weapons and equipment. He had a single Ar-peegee with a rocket already loaded and three additional rockets

stowed in a backpack on his back. He also had two satchels crossing his chest and hanging on either side. One satchel was full of grenades, while the other one had a few Semtex explosives in it.

Eren had an Aykem rifle slung on the front of his chest for easy access, as well as his engraved Marley pistol in a holster on his left hip. A holster that Sergei let him borrow. Eren had a Russian styled Army belt that had three additional Aykem magazines, with a fourth magazine located in the gun itself.

As far as weight, it wasn't too bad. Eren carried much heavier when he was a Scout, especially since the ODM gear weighed close to 20-30 kilograms, depending on how many swords you had left. All this equipment probably weighed close to that, so he knew he'd be fine.

Right near the main gate of the chain link fence was a box truck, that was parked right next to the fence. It was high enough that Eren knew he'd be able to run over and jump over the barbed wire. With years of practiced athleticism, Eren jumped onto the box truck and leaped over the fence.

Eren landed on the ground near a shipping container, but faltered as he did. He was a bit unused to having all this weight unsecure on him, since ODM gear was normally very stable. It was a minor annoyance, but nothing that would slow him down.

Eren moved along the side the container, ensuring that he was out of any gang members line of sight. The lights on the roof only illuminated the main open area in front of the warehouse, which allowed Eren to stay near the containers and use the darkness to his advantage. His black slacks and black hoody provided decent camouflage in the night.

Eren stopped where he was and unslung the Ar-peegee and took out a spare belt that he brought with him. The video Sergei showed had the Ar-peegee shoulder fired, but Eren didn't think that would be comfortable. Instead, he decided to jury rig a kind of thunder spear from the weapon.

Eren held the weapon in a reverse grip with his left hand, making sure his pinky rested on the trigger. Eldian Soldiers were experts in trigger discipline since you had to maintain contact with the triggers while moving with ODM gear in order to react in time. Even when they got the upgraded ODM gear, their three trigger handles required extreme discipline to use.

Eren took the belt and wrapped it around the tube of the weapon and his forearm, making sure it stayed flush on his arm. It felt very similar to a thunder spear, but Eren knew he wouldn't have time to get used to it. He'd have to move quick and effectively if he hoped to kill enough of them.

Once the belt was on his arm, he took out his Marleyan pistol and cocked the hammer back. It was ready to fire.

The primary purpose of this safehouse was to house supplies and act as a safe haven for members operating in the area. Eren didn't necessarily have to kill everyone, only destroy their supplies and make the building useless, which is why he had so many explosives.

Once everything was set, Eren took a deep breath. Right past the container was the open area with three total patrolling guards and the warehouse main door that was fortified and reinforced. There was a smaller door on the side that let people go through, but it would clearly be locked.

Once Eren was ready, he maneuvered his pinky to cock the hammer on the handle of the Ar-peegee and placed his finger back on the trigger. Everything was ready to go.

Eren got out of cover and aimed at the first guard nearest to him.

BANG!

The guard went down from a headshot thanks to his Marleyan pistol.

The other two guards yelled in Japanese in order to alert their fellow men, but Eren was quick in shooting them as well. He aimed at each man and put each down with a few more headshots, trying to conserve as much ammo as possible.

Eren heard shots right above him and stepped back behind the container. There were gang members in the upper floors of the warehouse that started shooting at him from the windows with automatic guns. Their aim was incredibly bad, so Eren didn't have to worry much about getting hit.

Using the containers as cover, Eren sprinted towards the main gate to give himself some room. He needed to time the use of the Ar-Peegee perfectly in order to maximize as many dead Yakuza members as possible.

Peeking from his cover, Eren noticed that they still were shooting at the spot where he initially took cover and didn't know where he was. Eren was safe for the moment and let them think he was there. They were too far to attack with a pistol, so Eren waited for them to use up their ammo.

After a few moments, the small door near the main door of the warehouse opened up and Yakuza members started running out in blind panic. No doubt they were expecting much worse than a single man.

Eren ran from cover towards the door. A few men saw him but didn't react in time.

Eren cocked his left arm back and shoved it forward while pressing the trigger of the Ar-peegee. He felt some minor recoil as it blasted from his hand and over towards the main door of the warehouse. Out of habit, Eren pulled back right as it impacted, as if he was pulling the string of a thunder spear.

BOOM!

The explosion destroyed the main door. These weapons, unlike thunder spears, shot a cone of molten copper into the target, which destroyed fortified areas, but wasn't too dangerous to nearby people. Sergei said during the Afghan war, captured Ar-peegees' were used against them and detonated near him, causing only minor injuries to anyone who wasn't directly in the path of the rocket.

Although the men near the door weren't killed, they were holding their ears from the loud explosion and concussive wave that stunned them. Even the men in the second floor were stunned.

Eren sprinted over to the opening he made, making sure to shoot the men dead before they could recover from the shock of the explosion. He shot each man as they held their ears in the head and made sure they were dead.

Eren stopped right at the opening he made, which was a circular hole that he'd be able to look through. Although it was awkward, Eren reloaded his pistol and the Ar-peegee before moving in.

Right inside were men who were either unconscious from the explosion or severely injured from the molten copper and shrapnel of the door. Some were still alive, but moaning in pain from either ruptured ear drums or the shrapnel. Eren quickly executed them so they couldn't get back up and become a threat.

Looking around for a moment, Eren saw that there were walkways above him with Yakuza members who were still holding their ears from the explosion below them. They were the ones shooting at him earlier.

To the right were administration buildings and offices for either paperwork, employees, or customers. No doubt that's where the bulk of the members were.

Eren ran a bit away from the door and turned around, intending to fire another Ar-peegee at the men in the upper walkway. Before he

could, an unarmed Yakuza member grabbed the Ar-peegee and tried to wrestle it from his hand.

Eren head butted him, stunning the man before kicking him away. Eren turned his back to the man and extended his arm out towards the upper walkway, firing another shot and pulling back as it made contact.

BOOM!

The entire walkway collapsed as men either fell or were blown to pieces from the direct hit. Eren felt the air hit him from behind as he knew the man who attacked him was just hit by the backblast of the weapon. He turned to look at the damage.

The man was completely unresponsive. His upper body was torn to pieces and his ears were covered in blood from the backblast. It reminded Eren of the carnage he saw in the trenches of the Mid East and the attack on Liberio.

Eren looked around at the support beams of the building. Once he learned of where the attack would be, Sergei showed him an online building plans of the warehouse. It showed blueprints and design information of the building, specifically where the structural supports were.

In the Eldian army, both prior to and after retaking Wall Maria, Soldiers were expected to help build and maintain civil infrastructure. Not only that, but they had to construct different machines and lifts for use on the walls.

The Scouts had even more training on this, since they would have to construct buildings and bases in Titan territory. Every single Soldier was an engineer by trade, which is why many Soldiers would get out and either go into farming or engineering when they got out of the Army.

Eren understood how buildings worked and basic engineering because of that. He knew what beams in this building were structurally important and where to destroy it. Granted, Eren wasn't a lead designer, so he wouldn't be able to really lead an engineering project very well, but he could understand designs and weaknesses of a structure.

He holstered his pistol and went over to some of the beams in the center. He knew these ones were used to hold the weight of the building and started placing the Semtex on each one. He quickly set it up with the remote trigger to detonate it when he got clear.

After setting the explosives, more men started to come out of the administration building. Eren took cover behind the steel beam as he reloaded the Ar-Peegee. He had two shots left so he was going to make it count.

The men were packed in front of the door leading into the offices, so they would be easy to hit. Eren moved from the beam and did the same motion again, pulling back right as it made contact.

BOOM!

This time, the rocket hit the men's feet. Although the explosion was concentrated forward, it was close enough that the entire group was blown to pieces from the explosion. The smoke that covered the door had a red mist that dissipated to reveal the torn and mangled bodies of the gang members.

Despite the success they had in the previous weeks ambush, Eren realized that their skill was lacking. These weren't trained Soldiers or warriors. They were simple men who were given a gun and didn't know how to fight well. Without surprise and momentum on their side, they were significantly less of a threat.

Eren loaded his final rocket and cocked the hammer back. He ran over to the center of the open area and fired the last shot at the wall of the admin section.

BOOM!

The wall had a large hole blown though, no doubt surprising the men inside since they were probably expecting Eren to come through the main door of the admin section.

Eren dropped the tube and holstered his pistol, prepared to engage in close combat. He took his Aykem and a grenade before throwing the grenade into the new hole. After waiting a moment before it exploded, Eren breached into the new hole.

There were a few men who Eren shot in order to ensure they were dead. A few men twitched but were likely dead. Still, he took no chances as he executed the gang members one by one.

Before Eren continued, he got out the remote detonator and prepared to blow the support beams. If his estimations were right, the central area of the warehouse would collapse but leave the admin area untouched. He hoped his was right.

With a push of the button, followed by large explosions from outside, he heard the main room of the warehouse collapse, burying any remaining survivors and equipment under all the steel and concrete rubble.

Thankfully, the admin area remained standing, which allowed Eren to fight his way to the exit and escape, now that the warehouse was effectively destroyed.

Once he moved through the office room, he went to the door on his left. Taking another grenade, Eren kicked open the door and threw it in. He waited a moment as the grenade exploded, killing more men inside. He breached into the room, a conference room, and did the same thing by executing anyone who looked like they may have survived.

Eren got to another door and prepared another grenade.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Plaster and paint hit Eren's face as bullets passed by his head, missing him by mere centimeters. Eren dove to the ground as the gunfire continued to blow apart the wall next to him. The men in the other room fired through the wall blindly, hoping to hit Eren.

Eren got to his knees, opened the door, and threw the grenade inside. The explosion silenced any gunfire from inside, allowing him to breach the next room.

Eren repeated this strategy for the next several minutes, clearing office room by office room. Each room was covered in splintered furniture, mangled bodies, and burnt paperwork all over the place. There were supplies as well, guns and ammunition mainly, which were damaged or destroyed by the grenades.

A few times, Eren would get surprised by a guy coming into the room before he could throw a grenade. A few times, they got close enough to where Eren had to engage them in hand-to-hand combat since they closed the distance before he could shoot them.

Eren quickly dispatched them, either by breaking a bone in a take down or by hitting them with his rifle.

However, each time Eren engaged in combat, he was getting more and more sluggish. His stamina depleting from the constant fighting since he was unable to take even a moment to rest. He had to maintain his tempo and aggression before they can properly react and prepare for a fight.

When Eren reached the last door, he took a moment to catch his breath. He was exhausted from the fighting. His movements were getting sluggish, and he felt himself covered in sweat. If the fighting continued, Eren was worried that he'd run out of energy. He had to get out before he was exhausted.

Eren took the next grenade he had and threw it into the last room. Right as he did though, the grenade flew back into the room he was in.

"Damn!" Eren screamed.

Abandoning caution, Eren dove into the room he was about to clear as the grenade went off. The blast was able to hit him and Eren's already ringing ears got worse, effectively deafening him. His head was pounding from the shockwave and he felt like he was just punched in the back. Thankfully, he felt like he was far enough that he didn't actually get injured, just dazed.

"Holy shit that was good!" He heard a familiar voice above him.

He looked up and saw the Yakuza boss who he was supposed to kill last week, the same one who ambushed him. He had a surprised but happy look on his face as he looked down at Eren.

"You know, I knew I should have worked with the Russian instead of tried to kill him, but I thought if I can get rid of the old man's supply, we'd have the advant- Shit!" He was cut off.

Eren stood up and attacked, throwing a punch that the boss managed to deflect and made room between Eren and himself.

"Damn, not even letting me talk." He laughed.

Eren charged again, throwing another few punches that caused the man to step back on the defensive. Eren's punches were sluggish, both from being tired and from the explosion that severely slowed him down.

"You are too weak." The boss smiled. "I grew up on the streets, I betted on myself in fights and became a mast-" He was cut off as Eren landed a round house punch on his face.

Eren used this opportunity to take his Aykem and shoot at the man, however, the boss managed to grab it at the last second and easily detached the magazine as it fired. Without its source of feed, it was useless.

"Ok, so you still got some fight." He smiled through a bruised and cut lip. "I wasn't expecting that faint."

He kicked Eren in the stomach while holding the rifle, causing Eren to lose the rifle. Eren stayed kneeling on the floor for a moment, taking the opportunity to rest and regain some strength.

"You know, I never expected a fucking kid to be able to do all this." He said, though continued to maintain his smile. "I actually kind of wished you'd taken my offer, but I have to admit, the challenge is a lot of fucking fun."

He threw the Aykem away and charged at Eren. Eren stood to try and defend but he was too slow and got kicked in the face. The exhaustion and injuries were starting to affect him.

"Come on!" The boss yelled. "Show me what you can do!"

He started punching and kicking at Eren, using a fighting style similar to Anny's but had its differences. He used a combination of kicks, punches, and short movements to either dodge Eren or deflect his own attacks.

He repeatedly kicked at Eren's shin, causing pain and making it difficult to stand. Eren gritted his teeth as he tried to ignore the pain, but it was getting too much to deal with. After another kick, Eren fell onto his back.

The boss got on top of Eren and started to punch him repeatedly. Eren tried to defend against the hits, but he was unable to effectively counter. He tasted blood in his mouth and felt the bruising start to appear from the hits.

"Damn, you're tough." The boss laughed as he stopped. "I knew the old man employed you for a reason. I'd actually hate for you to die like th-" He was cut off again.

Eren pushed his hips up, breaking his concentration and causing him to get off balance. Eren rolled him onto his back while getting on top of the boss. Eren started to punch the boss in the same way he did to Eren earlier. He was unable to get Eren off of him but was able to defend against him well enough.

Eren grabbed his arm and swung his legs around into an arm bar, pinning his arm between his legs as he used his hips to try and break his arm.

The boss managed to shift his shoulder in a way that prevented Eren from breaking it, instead keeping them in a locked state where Eren couldn't break it.

"How fucking tough are you!" He yelled. "Even when you're completely exhausted, I can't fucking win against a fucking child!"

"I am not a child." Eren grunted as he tried to pull on his arm even harder. "I am a DEVIL!" He pulled as hard as he could.

He felt the man's shoulder dislocated from the awkward position; the boss only able to ensure he didn't get a broken arm from the position. He screamed as he tried everything he could in order to break out of Eren's grasp.

He managed to twist his body and slide out of Eren's grip, the sweat both men accumulated during the fight allowed him to slip right out of Eren's grasp. He got up and moved back, creating space from Eren, who quickly stood up.

"Hear that?" He asked as Eren looked towards the window. Red and blue lights were flashing outside, along with sirens. "Cops are here, we should cut this short or we're both fucked."

He started making his way to the exit, calmly walking as if Eren was no longer a threat. His arm swayed slightly from the dislocation, but he quickly set it back into position.

"I'm not done yet." Eren said.

"Yes, you are." The boss said. "And I'm done, even if you were a step from death, I don't think I'd be able to beat you in a fair fight. Honestly, I haven't felt this way in a long time." He laughed to himself.

"What does that mean?" Eren asked.

"You're good kid, no... Devil." He grinned at the man. "A damned Devil, that's a good one. I haven't had this much fun or got this worried in a long time. This little war seemed like it was going to be too easy. But a child of the fucking devil decides to grace us. Damn, I'm excited." He laughed.

He opened the door, about to leave Eren to deal with the police alone.

"But I will admit, you're too much for me to handle. I'll need to find a way to deal with you without fighting. I'll also have to shore up my defenses. This is going to be one hell of a war." He said as he left.

Eren stood there for a moment, his ears ringing and his

Eren saw the door on the other side of the room bust open, men dressed in blue uniforms and black armor, carrying automatic gun, rushed in and screamed at him in Japanese. They aimed their guns at him and tried to get him to surrender.

Eren was too exhausted to fight anymore. He took his last grenade and pulled the pin, letting it slide out of his fingers and roll towards the men. They yelled as they rushed back through the door, trying to get away from the explosion.

Eren dove out of the window as the grenade went off, missing the main force of the explosion. The men were outside with him, taking cover from the explosion, but they didn't react in time as Eren got up and sprinted away.

They tried to yell at him to stop, not taking any shots at him as he ran away. Eren needed to find a way to escape from the authorities before he got caught. His simple illegal entry into this country would easily turn into a criminal charge.

Eren ran to the dock and dove into the water. The only thing he had left was his Marleyan pistol that was still in its holster. He swam underneath one of the shipping vessels so as to break any kind of line of sight with the authorities.

After surfacing, Eren swam a few hundred meters with the current in order to reach the coast a little way away from the warehouse. Eren pulled himself onto the beach, barely having the energy to move anymore.

He rolled onto his back, his torso covered in wet sand and his hood down. He tried to get up but was too tired and injured. Now that the adrenaline wore off, Eren realized that he was covered in cuts and bruises from the fight. His clothes were completely ruined and damaged from the explosions and glass when he jumped out of the window.

"Get up." Eren told himself. "Get... up." He said again, gritting his teeth.

Eren rolled onto his stomach and started to push himself up. It wouldn't take long for the authorities to follow the current and get him. He needed to move now.

"Damn, you survived." Eren heard in front of him.

"Sergei?" He asked.

" *Da.* " Sergei confirmed. "You're still alive, and judging from explosions, sounds like you succeeded." He said.

"Not without injury." Eren said as he stumbled forward.

Sergei rushed over to him and grabbed him, letting Eren rest on his shoulder for support.

"I'm truly amazed you survived. I didn't think it'd be possible." He said.

"Don't doubt me again." Eren wheezed.

"Say that after we get you to hospital." He said. "Let's go, I know good hospital that is discrete."

Sergei carried Eren over to the car, but Eren was putting minimal effort into staying up. He felt completely spent from the fight and he wasn't used to being so hurt and not healing quickly. The last time he felt this messed up was probably after retaking wall Maria.

"Come on, stay with me!" Sergei said as Eren completely collapsed.

Eren couldn't hear anything anymore, nor could he see with his eyes closed. Eren wasn't feeling much of anything right now, only exhaustion and tiredness.

Everything went black before Eren hit the ground.

Next Morning

"Careful Ai." Meimei said as they were practicing for their next concert on Saturday. "You need to make sure your hip is in rhythm."

"Yea, it's always a bit hard for songs that go this fast." Ai laughed.

"Don't worry, we all have off days." She laughed.

"Yea, unlike you Meimei." Nino joked.

"Hey, just because I'm the best dancer, doesn't mean I'm perfect."
She waived off.

"Yea, sure." Ari laughed as well.

"Listen up girls." President Saitou walked into the dance studio.

"Hai!" All girls stood at attention and gave a poor attempt at a military salute.

"Seriously?" He asked as he shook his head.

"We're listening boss!" Meimei said in a serious a military like tone.

"Stop that." He grumbled.

All the girls broke their composure and started laughing at their company president. He always got annoyed when they acted so formal around him.

"The concert this week is going to be one of our biggest yet. Specifically, there'll be a lot of producers there to scout out B-Komachi." He explained.

"Really?" Ai asked.

"Which means, if it goes well, we could get a chance to do a show at the Tokyo Dome." He said.

"Really?!" Ari screamed. "That's amazing!"

"There's no promises yet." He said. "They're only scouting right now; I don't expect us to even get that chance for at least another few months. We'll still need to do some smaller jobs before they'll consider us. But this will be an initial look."

"Man, if we hit that, we'll be famous for sure!" Meimei said in excitement.

"Yea, imagine. So few idols even get the chance to go to the Dome." Nino said.

"Which is why we need to make sure everything is perfect." He said. "So, make sure everyone's affairs are in order and get some rest in the next few days. I need you girls completely rested for Saturday."

"Can do!" The girls saluted again, making President Saitou face palm at their antics.

"Hold up." Ai said as he phone started to ring. "Hello? Eren?" She asked as she answered it.

"Eren's on the phone?" Meimei asked, her curiosity peaked.

"Shush." Ai said, not in the mood for their teasing.

"This is Ai, yes?" An unfamiliar voice said over the phone.

"Yes, this is her." She said. "I'm sorry, who is this? How do you have Eren-Sans phone?" She asked.

The voice had decent Japanese, but he had a very thick accent. She assumed it was maybe Russian.

"Ai, put it on speaker." Meimei whispered.

Ai nodded, unsure of who this was and wanted the support of her friends, so she put it on speaker.

"I am boss of Eren Yeager, he's hurt." He said.

"Hurt!?" Ai yelled into the speaker. "What happened!?"

"There was shipping accident, Eren is in hospital now." He said.

"Where!?" Ai yelled.

"Calm down and stop yelling, you're taking ear off." He said in broken Japanese. "Just come to hospital, will text you address."

"What happened?" Ai asked.

"We had collapse at work, Eren got hurt, but he's ok. Just unconscious, figured he could use people he knows for support." The man said.

"I'll be right over." Ai said. "Thank you." Ai hung up the phone.

"Let's go Ai." Meimei said, grabbing her jacket.

"You don't need to come with me." She said.

"Yes I do, you're my friend and I'm coming." She said. "We'll pick up the kids from downstairs and bring them along. We should make sure Eren is ok."

"Ok." Ai said.

"Hold up." Saitou began.

"President, we have to make sure he's ok." Meimei said. "Otherwise, Ai might get distracted."

"Damnit." Saitou said. "Fine but take Miyako with you. I want to keep her near the kids so we can maintain that they are her kids and not Ai's."

"No problem boss." Meimei said.

"What about you?" Ai asked the President.

"I'm going to get some work done, I just need to check something." He said.

As the girls left, Saitou went into his office to check his computer. He was a bit busy and putting it off, but he needed to run a background check on Eren.

Taking out his notebook, he flipped it over to where he had his passport number.

Saitou sipped his coffee as he opened the government database and placed a request for an employee background check by entering in the number. It would take a few days for them to get back to him, so he'd have to be patient and wait for the results.

After closing his computer, he stretched in his chair as he prepared to head home. He was hoping for a romantic night with Miyako, but clearly that would be put on pause.

And there's the safehouse attack lol.

I hope you guys enjoyed it. I tried to make it somewhat realistic while at the same time maintaining Eren's abilities. Even without powers or ODM gear, the sheer strength of someone like his is unreal. Plus, he had a lot of advantages on his side. I do wonder what you guys think of Eren using the RPG in that way, I thought it was funny and fitting lol. Also, because he still doesn't know English, he doesn't know the acronyms, so he calls those weapons phonetically.

Anyway, hope you guys enjoyed.

Eren is in the Hospital

Chapter 20: Eren is in the Hospital

Eren's head was in a lot of pain when he opened his eyes again. The bright lights stung his eyes as they fought to get adjusted to the brightness. He felt dizzy and nauseous, a feeling he really hasn't felt in years. He guessed that the last time he felt this exhausted was while recovering after a few training accidents during the Cadet training. Since he became a shifter, pain was something he only experienced for a few hours at worst.

"Finally, you're awake." He heard a familiar Russian voice to his left.

"If you're what greets me in the afterlife, I know I've been evil." Eren said sarcastically.

Sergei was sitting next to his hospital bed in a relaxed pose with his legs crossed. He looked bored.

Eren took a moment to reflect on his current state. He noticed that there was bandaging and cloth on his face to help with the bruising. His left eye was swollen, and he could barely see out of it. He noticed there was a small tube in his arm that ran to a bag. He had no idea what its function was, but assumed it had something to do with the medical technology here.

His body felt sore and underneath the hospital gown, he could see some bad bruising and a few freshly made cuts. They were already scabbing over and should heal within the next week or two.

Thankfully, Eren didn't feel any broken bones or injured joints.

"No, no afterlife yet. Though with how reckless and suicidal you are, I wouldn't be surprised if you'll be there soon." He said.

"You already doubted me once." Eren said.

"And I wasn't proven wrong." Sergei said as he crossed his hands.

"After what I did?" Eren asked.

"If I didn't happen to drive by where you washed up, you'd either be dead or in police custody, which is the same fate." Sergei said.

"How is being arrested the same fate?" Eren asked.

"Because they'd give you death penalty for what you did." Sergei said.

"They're criminals." Eren countered. "Why would they care?"

"Being Yakuza alone is not crime in Japan." Sergei said. "As far as the law would be concerned, you murdered innocent people."

"Even with all those guns stored there?" Eren asked.

"Da, those would carry charges." Sergei said. "However, most workers at warehouse would not be charged because there would be no way to implicate them. Even if they were criminals, vigilantism is also illegal."

"Either way, I survived." Eren said.

"By sheer luck." Sergei said. "If fate didn't happen to place me there, you'd be gone. Then what?"

"Then I'd fail, at which point I die." Eren said. "But at least I fought."

"Damn, your views are so fucked, you know that?" Sergei said.

"What else am I supposed to do here?" Eren asked.

"Maybe try to do something with life other than going on suicide fights." Sergei said.

"You got me into this life Sergei." Eren said.

"Again with this?" Sergei asked. "I didn't make you attack safehouse, hell, even Yakuza boss didn't force you. That was you."

"I had to show that bastard that he doesn't own me." Eren said.

"So, you go off and get yourself killed to stay free from Yakuza?" Sergei asked. "I don't think it worked, because now boss is very invested and interested in you. If you wanted to stay out of war, you failed. Badly."

"Now he knows not to fuck with me." Eren said.

"No, now he knows he needs different way to deal with you if you no longer follow what he says." Sergei said.

"What do you mean?" Eren asked.

"Do you think he's stupid, that he won't try to find some way to deal with you if you become problem? What happens if you join his rival? Do you think that he won't plan for that?" Sergei countered.

"He knows not to mess with me." Eren said.

"Instead, he'll target more vulnerable prey." Sergei said.

"Speak plainly Sergei." Eren said.

"Single mom, Ai. You think he won't target her?" Sergei asked.

"Oyabun will have a death wish if he did." Eren said.

"He already has people reporting on you and her." Sergei said.

"What?" Eren asked.

"There are a lot of people that report to Oyabun Yoshida. He owns largest Yakuza in Tokyo. He doesn't need people to tail you, just

report on you." Sergei said.

"Ai keeps her identity hidden." Eren said.

"From normal people, these are Yakuza. And you didn't exactly stay subtle yourself." He countered. "Yoshida probably knows that the girl you see is Ai from B-Komachi."

"So, he's using her against me?" Eren asked in frustration.

"Partially, yes." Sergei answered.

"Partially?" Eren asked.

"This new boss, from the Nakano-Kai, you think he won't try to target Ai now?" Sergei asked. "Yoshida knows you have people you associate with. Not only does he want to keep them as collateral to deal with you, but he also wants to protect them so that others can't manipulate you against him."

"So, he's going to protect Ai?" Eren asked.

"When warriors are away from their tribe is when the enemy attacks." Sergei said. "You can't possibly be there to always protect her, so Yoshida will protect her as well in order to make sure no one can leverage you against him."

"How do you know all this?" Sergei asked.

"Because I'm damn good criminal, and it's what I would do." Sergei said.

"Then I'll have a word with Yoshida." Eren said.

"I'd recommend don't, at least not now." Sergei said.

"Why?" Eren asked.

"Because, even if he plans to use her against you, he will devote a lot of resources to protect her. Especially with how you proved yourself." Sergei said. "So, at least until Nakano-Kai boss is dealt with and this little gang war is over, I'd recommend you let him tail you and her. That way she stays protected."

"Will Ai know?" Eren asked.

"No, she won't. They will not approach her unless she is in danger and you're not around." Sergei answered.

"Damn." Eren said to himself.

"You care a lot about her, don't you." Sergei said.

"She's an innocent person that doesn't deserve to be brought into this." Eren said automatically.

"So, you don't see her as a lover?" Sergei asked.

"No, she's not my lover, nor will she ever be." Eren denied.

"Yet you have a desire to protect her." Sergei noticed.

"Shut up Sergei." Eren said.

"Speaking of which, she's on her way." Sergei commented.

"You called her!?" Eren asked angrily.

" *Da.* " Sergei said.

"Why the hell did you call her here?" Eren asked.

"Figured a little bit of tender care would help you after what happened. And that's not something I'm good at." Sergei laughed.

"Do you think it's a good idea for her to see me like this?" Eren pointed out. "She could piece together that I was at the safehouse."

"Do you really think so?" Sergei asked.

"What the hell do I say to explain this?" Eren asked.

"What were you going to say when you get discharged and she sees all your injuries at home anyway?" Sergei asked. "She'll learn about injuries anyway, and if she's going to piece it together now than she'll piece it together later. It doesn't matter when you tell her about injuries."

Eren wasn't sure what to say about that. These injuries would be around for a while, especially the bruising. He would have no way of explaining it.

"It's better if we explain now while I'm here." Sergei said. "Work related accidents in manual labor is very common. Besides, Ai is no doctor, so she won't be able to tell injuries are from fight and not product collapse."

"They can still piece it together." Eren said.

"You think uneducated idiot and two four-year-old children would believe their neighbor is the Akuma No Ko?" Sergei asked.

"The what?" Eren asked.

"You didn't see news." Sergei said. "Let me show you."

Sergei took out his phone and showed Eren a news article. Eren couldn't read it, but he saw pictures showing security footage of the attack, specifically him using the Ar-peegee against the Yakuza.

"By the way, who the fuck uses RPG like that?" Sergei asked.

"I'm more used to it like that." Eren said.

"You're fucking high, I don't know how you survived. How did you even aim?" Sergei asked.

"You just get really good at it." Eren said.

"Point is, a lot of Yakuza were detained by the police. Most will be set free since they can't pin charges, but they're all talking about the western devil who destroyed them. The media dubbed you the Akuma No Ko." Sergei said as he put the phone away.

"What does that mean?" Eren asked.

"A word for word translation is Devil of Child, but Japanese is reversed to English. It basically means Child of Evil or the Child of the Devil. Depends on how you want to translate it." He said.

"So, they've made a name for me?" Eren asked.

"You weren't subtle kid." Sergei said.

"And you don't think Ai would think I was involved?" Eren asked.

"If you were told that Ai was prostitute, would you believe it?" No, Eren would not. "Because people we're close to don't ever automatically assume we're bad people. They'll believe anything, especially if she cares for you. You don't even have to be very good at lying."

"I still don't like it." Eren said.

"Better here than a few days later in apartment. At least I can vouch for you." Sergei said.

"Because you're the picture of reliable." Eren countered back.

"You're Ukrainian immigrant who served in Russian army, I'm Russian immigrant who served in Afghan war. It's not odd for me to want to help a fellow veteran." Sergei said. "Plus, unlike you, I actually have legitimate businesses that they can look up. Under false names of course."

"Whatever you say Sergei." Eren waved him off.

"Besides, maybe if you see her now, you might rethink your suicidal ways." Sergei said.

"What's that mean?" Eren asked.

"You need someone to temper you. Someone who can show you more than fighting or death." He said.

"I'm not using Ai like some kind of moral compass." Eren said.

" *E-excuse m-me.* " A nurse came into the room.

Eren noticed she was probably around mid to late twenties, dressed in a white shirt, white pants, and had a weird kind of white hat.

" *T-there a-are people here t-to see you.* " She said.

" *Send them in.* " Sergei said in Japanese.

"She seemed nervous." Eren said.

" *Da*, I had to threaten her." Sergei said nonchalantly.

"Threaten her?" Eren asked.

"Hospitals usually run a check with the police for situations like this, especially after what happened." Sergei said. "The director of this hospital is a Yakuza member and normally lets in people who are questionable and doesn't report certain people if the money is good."

"And that's legal?" Eren asked.

"It's legal for him to be Yakuza, but everything else is illegal." Sergei said. "Just don't get caught." He shrugged.

"And the girl?" He mentioned the nurse who left.

"She learned you weren't being reported since you had combat related injuries and decided to be a morally upstanding citizen."

Sergei said.

"So, you threatened her?" Eren asked. "How?"

"You'd be amazed at how little security people put on their Social Media." He laughed. "I found out she has young son and even what school he goes to."

"So, you threatened her kid?" Eren asked.

"I told her if she reported anything, I'd hang her son upside down and skin him in front of her."

Eren stared at Sergei, not entirely sure if he was being serious or not. There was a long pause after Sergei's chuckle before he realized he said something odd.

"I wouldn't do it." Sergei put his hands up. "But she doesn't know that I wouldn't..." He trailed off. "It's just a lie and empty threat to keep you from the electric chair, or whatever form of execution Japan does these days. I honestly don't even know if they do capital punishment anymore." He trailed off.

"Glad you have morals." Eren said sarcastically.

"Do you think Eren is ok?" Ai asked Miyako as she drove.

Ai was in the back where she normally was with her kids, while Meimei was in the front seat but with Miyako driving.

"I'm sure he's ok." Miyako said.

"Yea, his boss just said there was an accident at work. He should be fine." Meimei said.

"If he was badly hurt, there would have been a different conversation on the phone." Miyako reassured Ai.

"I know, it's just, I hope he's ok." She said.

"Awe, little Ai worried her boyfriend might be hurt?" Meimei teased.

"H-he's not like that. It's normal to worry about a guy who's hurt Meimei." Ai tried to argue.

"Don't worry mama, Eren-San is tough." Ruby smiled.

"Yea he is." Meimei turned around to address Ruby. "After all, he fought that one guy off. A little slip won't keep him down." She laughed.

"Meimei, please face forward." Miyako said.

"Awe come on." She sighed. "I'm just playing with Ruby-Chan."

"Would you just act your age for once?" Miyako said angrily. "You and all the other girls are almost twenty, maybe you should start acting your age!"

"Kind of hard when we constantly have to pretend to be sweet and innocent girls all the time." Meimei said while adopting a cute pose.

"I swear, you idols have maturing issues from how you always have to act." Miyako shook her head.

"You used to be fun, what changed? Getting too old?" Meimei joked.

"You know my husband can afford to lose one idol; you're making it tempting Meimei." Miyako said threateningly, though giggled a bit at her threat.

"Bring it on, all that dancing we do keeps us strong and in shape." Meimei winked at Miyako.

"Hold up, something's on the radio." Miyako cut her off.

Miyako turned the volume up so they could hear the news report better. Everyone was listening in, curious at what caught Miyako's attention.

"According to recent reports, there was an all-out attack on a warehouse over in the port at Yokosuka. So far, a few workers who have been known to have ties to the Nakano-Kai Yakuza group have been apprehended and are undergoing questioning. CCTV cameras have also captured much of the fighting, though in grainy detail."

"According to current assumptions, it's believed that the western Yakuza member was involved. Footage shows a single man equipped with military grade weapons and explosives attacked the warehouse. So far, other media reports are referring to him as the Akuma No Ko, since the apprehended Yakuza members have reported he's likely in his teens."

"The Akuma No Ko is seen using a rocket launcher in a reverse grip. Additionally, he's seen using explosives and several grenades to not only kill the people in the warehouse, but also destroy the contents inside. It's discovered that much of the destroyed equipment are military grade weapons that have been smuggled from China, such as rifles and pistols."

"The police have confirmed that there is an escalation in gang activity and that this event proves there is a war between the Yakuza groups in Tokyo. The police are instituting an 11 PM curfew for all residents of Tokyo. Residents are advised to report any suspicious activity to the police."

After the radio switched to a J-Pop song, which actually happened to be one of B-Komachi's songs, Miyako lowered the volume, so it was barely able to be heard.

"That's crazy." Ai said as she looked down.

"Yea..." Meimei agreed. "The Yakuza have military grade weapons? And they're fighting each other now?" She asked in disbelief.

"That's horrible." Ai said.

"Mama, what is going on? Is it getting worse?" Ruby asked.

"It's ok Ruby-Chan." Ai said to her daughter lovingly. "It's only for a little while, until the police catch the people responsible."

Ruby looked a bit worried about it but didn't question her mother. She knew that Ai was always right about these things, so she didn't want to question her own mother.

"What do you think of this new devil guy?" Meimei asked.

"I don't know." Ai responded. "Whoever he is, he sounds dangerous."

"The police have made a statement, saying that according to the CCTV footage, the attack was carried out entirely by the Akuma No Ko, which so far there are an estimated thirty casualties in the warehouse."

"T-thirty people killed by one man?" Miyako asked in surprise.

"Who is even able to do that?" Meimei asked.

"This guy is insane." Miyako agreed.

"But the police will get him soon though." Ai tried to look on the bright side. "After all, Japan is a safe and well protected place. We have some of the best police, so we'll be fine."

Ai didn't want to think about the potential terrorist that was running around Tokyo right now. She didn't like the idea of people like that, people who hurt others for their own gain and benefit. So, she had full faith that the Japanese police would be able to handle the situation before it got worse.

"Still though, thirty people that were armed." Meimei said to herself. "This guy can't be human."

"Maybe he's some rogue experiment." Miyako laughed.

"Yea, like some kind of secret American super soldier. Like that one movie Aqua watched, the one with the shield?" Meimei laughed.

Aqua got annoyed at that. He still didn't know why these women didn't appreciate western films. Especially superhero movies, if there was one thing America did well in entertainment, it was their movies.

"We shouldn't worry about any of that." Ai said as she put her arms around both of her children. "They news is scary and not good for little kids, so we should turn it off."

"Some of us still actually listen to the news Ai." Miyako said.

"Nope!" Ai said cheerfully. "No bad things when they're around." She pointed to her children for emphasis.

"Fine." Miyako said as she turned the radio off.

"Star-T-Rain, really?" Meimei asked.

"It's a good song." Miyako said.

"I know, but I really don't want to hear my voice right now." Meimei laughed.

"It would be better if we saw a video, you're dancing is much better." Ai teased.

"Still doesn't match your looks apparently. If being an idol required talent, you'd be out of a job Ai." She shot back in a similarly joking manner.

"Mama is the best!" Ruby defended, though had to be held down by Ai before she tried to attack Meimei.

"I guess Ai-Chan's number one fan disagrees with me." Meimei laughed. "I can't argue with that."

"Nope, not at all." Ai laughed as she held a struggling Ruby.

"Hey Eren, how are you?" Ai asked as she walked into the room.

Ai almost slapped herself at the stupid question. How did she think he was doing? There was an accident at work and her looked bruised and hurt from the accident. It was such a stupid question to ask.

"Eren, hope you're doing ok." Meimei said.

That sounded much better, at least it showed she cares about his health.

Both girls had their disguises on their head, specifically a ballcap and large sunglasses that helped to hide their identity. Both girls had to use a fake identity in order to make sure both the staff and other patients didn't recognize them.

Both girls froze for a moment as they saw a man who they assumed was Eren's boss. He was clearly a westerner, with a well-kept beard and slicked back hair that had a lot of grey showing. He wore a long trench coat and seemed intimidating to the two young idols.

"Hey Ai, Meme." Eren greeted.

"Ok, now you're doing that on purpose." Meimei grumbled. "It's Meimei."

Eren shrugged, not caring too much about her constantly correcting him. He never really tried to remember her name since it was so confusing to him.

"You're idol girls, right?" Sergei asked.

"Eto..." Ai stuttered, unsure of what to say to the man who knew they were idols.

"H-how do you know?" Meimei asked.

"Saw you girls when I dropped kid off at beach, not hard to put together." He shrugged.

"I knew we should have just picked Eren up..." Meimei whispered to herself.

"Don't worry, secret safe with me." Sergei laughed at their reactions. "I'm actually big fan, hope to get autograph one day."

"Sure." Meimei smiled and posed with a peace sign.

"Of course, we'd love to." Ai did the same pose.

Both girls fell into their idol persona around the stranger, which really annoyed Eren, though Sergei seemed to enjoy it.

"Where's your kids?" Eren asked Ai.

"They're with Miyako-san at the waiting room. Kids aren't allowed here since they're too young unless they get special permission to visit family." Ai explained.

"Hope they're doing ok." Eren said.

"So, is Eren-San ok?" Meimei asked.

"DA, he's ok." Sergei said. "We had accident at warehouse in northern Tokyo, a bunch of boxes fell from shelf onto him."

"Oh no..." Ai said sadly.

"I got video of it too, want to see?" Sergei held out his phone.

"No, no, we're good." Meimei waved off, not wanting to see Eren get hurt.

"You sure, it's really cool." He laughed.

"I think they're good." Eren said, playing along with the lie.

"So you employ Eren?" Meimei asked.

"Da." Sergei said.

"Are you Ukrainian too? Your English accent is unfamiliar to me."
She said.

"Ukrainian?" Sergie laughed. "No, I'm Russian."

"How do you know Eren?" She asked. "I thought Ukrainians and Russians don't like each other."

"Don't like each other?" Sergei laughed at that. "Twenty years ago, Ukraine was a part of Russia, well, sort of." He stated simply.
"Depends on what you call the old Soviet Union. Besides, plenty of Ukrainians are still loyal to the old Russian way."

"So, how do you know Eren exactly?" Meimei asked.

"He's veteran, like me." Sergei said. "I fought for the Soviet Union back in the 80s, got a business moving supplies and antiques through Japan from the mainland, and built quite the business for myself. I met Eren a little while ago and offered him a job. He was fresh out of Russian army so didn't have many places to go."

"Yea, that about sums up my life story." Eren shrugged, not elaborating since he knew it could cause them to be suspicious from his lie if he said anything contradictory.

"I thought you were from Ukraine." Meimei said.

"I was conscripted by the Russians after they took Crimea." Eren lied.

Ai paused for a moment when Eren said that. There was a feeling that Eren wasn't being all that truthful to them. He didn't seem like he outright lied, but it was weird to her. Up until now, he's always been

vague, but now seemed different. She couldn't explain it, but he seemed different when he said that.

"Well, I'm glad you're here now." Ai smiled at him. "Japan is completely peaceful anyway and I'm glad you found people you can rely on." She referred to Sergei.

Ai chose to ignore that feeling, interpreting it was her being paranoid or just overthinking things. After all, what reason does Eren have to lie? Even if he did lie, it was understandable. Talking about being forcefully conscripted and made to fight a war probably wouldn't be something someone wanted to talk about in detail.

She heard stories about American Soldiers who would either lie about their experiences or refuse to talk about it because they witnessed terrible and tragic things. Either innocent people getting killed or nearly dying themselves. Ai knew nothing of what being a Soldier was like so she didn't question it if Eren did decide to lie about certain things.

After all, she knew better than anyone that lying can be a shield to protect oneself. She knew that if Eren did lie, it wasn't to manipulate or hurt others, but more so to protect himself.

"Eren should be ok to discharge today, the hospital doesn't think it's necessary to keep him longer than obsoletely needed." Sergei said.

"We can drive you home Eren, if that's ok with Sergei-San." Ai said.

"Sergei-San?" Sergei smiled. "That sounds cute from you girl." He laughed.

Sergei was actually kind of happy meeting an idol. They're as cute and innocent as they portray themselves. Of course, he knew it was all an act and a lie, but he wouldn't have it any other way. He loved western and Asian entertainment.

Ai and Meimei though were a bit uncomfortable from the Russian. It was so weird to have a man that was clearly in his 50s or 60s like young Japanese idols. Especially with how he smiled, which just screamed scary and intimidating.

"Anyway, I should leave and let you have alone time." Sergei laughed as he walked past Ai and Meimei. "Seems kid has his ride home."

"Thank you for letting us know Sergei-San." Ai bowed respectfully to the old Russian.

Sergei waved goodbye as he left the room, intending to get back to his work.

"That's another guy who knows who we are." Meimei sighed in a bit of frustration.

"Sorry." Eren said.

"It's not your fault." Ai waved him off. "We should have been more careful, though we shouldn't tell the President. He'll have a fit." Ai said.

"Agreed, the old man will have a heart attack." Meimei agreed.

"So, how are you doing Eren?" Ai asked again. "Are you in pain?"

"Surprisingly, not really." Eren said. "I thought I'd be in more pain from what happened."

"They probably have some kind of Anesthesia in your IV." Meimei mentioned.

"Anesthesia are special medicines that help to reduce the feelings of pain, which can sometimes have side effects like drowsiness and confusion." Ai recounted from what she heard about from a TV show. "At least I think that's how it worked."

Meimei and Eren stared at her, which caused Ai to look at them in confusion. Did she say something weird.

"What?" She asked.

"Why did you just explain all of that?" She asked.

"Because I figured Eren didn't know." She shrugged. "You didn't, right?" She turned to Eren.

Eren stayed quiet, not wanting to let her know that, yes, he didn't know what that was until she explained it.

"See, he does that thing where when he doesn't know something, his eyes narrow." She pointed out.

"Wow, you are already learning his subtle habits?" Meimei laughed.

"Sorry Eren, I didn't mean to imply anything." Ai apologized, hoping she didn't offend him.

"It's ok." He shrugged. "I appreciate you telling me." He said.

"Yea, she's starting to learn a lot about you Eren." Meimei gave a coy smile. "Maybe she lik-"

"Quiet!" Ai said as she grabbed Meimei's mouth.

"Everything ok?" Eren asked.

"Of course, everything is fine." She laughed.

"We should take you home now." Meimei suggested. "I'll ask the nurse for a wheelchair."

"I don't need one." Eren said as he started to get up.

"Hold on, you still have an IV in your arm." Ai said as she rushed over to Eren and gently pushed him back into the bed.

"I can just take it out." He said.

"No, we need a medical professional to do it." Ai said.

"It's just a needle." Eren said.

"You can hurt yourself or get infected." Ai said angrily. "Let a doctor or a nurse pull it out." She said again.

"It's nothing I can't handle Ai." He pushed against her, trying to stand up.

Ai inhaled as he did, getting clearly angry at Eren. What is wrong with him, doesn't he see he's being a fool by just not cooperating and trying to act tough?

"Listen Eren." She said sternly. "You were crushed by a bunch of boxes are hurt. So, we're going to make sure everything is done the correct way. So, you're not going anywhere until a doctor says you can leave and until a doctor pulls that IV out. I don't care how tough or manly you think you are, but you're staying healthy no matter what."

Eren stared at the short girl, completely shocked that she just scolded him like a child. It's not like it bothered him. Eren had much worse in the past. Between getting his limbs repeatedly ripped, cut, or bitten off, to gauging out his own eye, Eren suffered much more than this little bit of scratches and bruises.

Yet now, he was being bullied into remaining in a hospital bed by someone who he could easily overpower. Even if he was missing both arms he could overpower her, very easily.

Yet instead, he relented and laid back into the bed and followed her instruction.

"Fine." Eren said in defeat.

"Good." Ai smiled. "It's important to care about your health, so I'll help take care of you."

"Great." He said in annoyance.

However, Eren felt kind of nice at the care she showed. He didn't really remember a time when someone cared so much about him. Sure, Mikasa always protected him, but the way she cared for him was more by protecting him. The last time he felt this kind of care was maybe his mother.

Ai gave off this motherly care that was so different from her idol personality. It wasn't forced like that persona and came very naturally to her. He wondered if this was the real her.

A different nurse from before wheeled in a wheelchair and helped Eren get into it after removing his IV. Eren was a bit weak from recovering but didn't feel too bad overall. Ai got behind the wheelchair and started pushing him out of the room, with Meimei in front so she could clear the way for them.

Eren was wheeled to the waiting area, where Ruby and Miyako were waiting for them.

"Eren-San, good to see you." Miyako said.

"Thank you, Yako." Eren said.

"Yako?" She asked.

"You mean Miyako?" Meimei asked as she crossed her hands.

"Your names aren't that easy for me to remember you know." He said. "The only one that's easy is Ai, because it's like an eye." He pointed to his own eye.

Meimei and Miyako looked annoyed at him but Ai laughed at that. She guessed it made sense, since he's probably more used to Russian and Ukrainian names than Japanese.

"Plus, it's fun to annoy that one." He pointed to Meimei.

"Hmmpf!" Meimei turned away from Eren in annoyance.

Ai giggled again, glad that Eren was able to joke around a little bit despite what happened to him.

"Glad to see you're developing a sense of humor." Miyako said.

"So, we're going back to my apartment?" Eren asked.

"Sort of." Ai said.

"Sort of?" Eren asked.

"I'm actually going to have you stay in my apartment for a few days until you fully recover." She said.

"That's really not necessary." Eren said.

"It's ok, I insist." Ai said. "After all, you did save me before so it's the least I can do. Besides, after the stunt you pulled in the hospital room, I think you'll need someone nearby to care about your health." She glared at him.

"Fine." Eren shrugged.

Meimei was glad that Eren seemed to be a bit less stoic than before. He seemed like he was opening up a bit, especially around Ai, who was the only one trying to actually create opportunities for them to spend time.

"Hey Miyako-San, where's Aqua?" Ai asked.

"He said he needed to use the bathroom." Miyako said.

"Yea, but wait, that was twenty minutes ago..." Ruby thought to herself.

"That's true." Miyako said.

"I'll go check on him." Ai said.

"Ai, that's the men's restroom." Miyako tried to dissuade her.

Ai ignored her and went to the restroom anyway. With very little care or regard for privacy, she went in to find her son and make sure he was ok. The group waited outside the rest room entrance while she went in, and luckily, there were no men that were using it while she was there. However, the emptiness wasn't a good thing.

"Where is my son!?" Ai screamed as she ran out of the bathroom.

Twenty Minutes Ago

Aqua sneaked outside of the main door of the hospital, lying to Miyako that he needed to use the restroom. Hopefully, it would buy him enough time to get far enough away so it would take them a while to find him.

He knew Ai would be upset, but he couldn't waste this opportunity. The place where *she* worked was a thirty-minute walk from the hospital, meaning he'd be able to easily reach her from here. If he got far enough away, it would take Ai a little while to find him, then when he was finished, he could call Miyako from Ai's phone, which he took from her purse.

He felt bad for running away, but he needed more information on who Eren is, and that strange journal of his made Aqua question a lot of things about him. So, he resolved to run away for at least an hour or two, get his answers, and take the scolding and reprimanding from Ai when he returned. This was too perfect of a chance to ignore.

Now all he had to do was reach the location, which as long as he kept at a relatively fast pace, he'd reach there in time. His small body

would make the trip difficult, but he knew he'd get there before Ai realized he was gone. Hopefully, she would also spend some time with Eren so she'd take longer.

Aqua was also glad that Miyako was still not the best at watching kids. She got better, much better, but she got too complacent in how well behaved Aqua and Ruby were, that she saw no issues with letting a four-year-old use a restroom alone. It gave him the perfect chance to slip out unnoticed.

Truthfully, he wasn't worried about Ai. She'd be easy to deal with. It was *her* that really freaked him out, and he dreaded having to see her again.

Hope you guys enjoyed this one lol.

I know a lot of people would think that people might piece together that Eren was at the warehouse, but I doubt it. After all, if someone told you that your friend was a criminal, would you believe them. Plus, I'd say the lie Sergei came up with was convincing, he even had "Video evidence", which he knew Ai wouldn't verify.

Anyway, hope you guys liked this chapter and the next one will finally see who "She" is lol. I hope I meet expectations. Again, it's an OC, not an established character. But you guys might find her interesting, plus the place she works at lol.

More Questions About Eren

Chapter 21: More Questions About Eren

Aqua was completely out of breath. He was panting heavily and covered in sweat from the run, already starting to get cold from the cool air. His thirty-minute trip to this location actually only took him fifteen or twenty minutes due to the police chasing him.

As it turns out, four-year-olds are not supposed to be walking around alone in the street. Such an easy thing to forget when you're reincarnated. The moment a police officer saw him, he immediately came over and started asking questions.

"Hey kid, where are your parents?" He asked.

"Eto..." Aqua had no lie prepared.

So, he just ran. Luckily, Japan was very crowded during this time of day, and since he was still a toddler, he could run through it much easier than the full-grown police. Next time, he'd need to have an excuse prepared if he ever intended to do these solo tasks again.

However, despite being chased by half a dozen cops and losing them in the crowd, he was able to get to his destination much faster.

That location was, Shuchi'in Academy, one of the most prestigious private schools in Japan and the workplace of *her* .

The academy itself was amazing, significantly better than his high school that he went to outside of Tokyo. He was always a bit jealous of such prestigious schools, but also figured he couldn't handle being surrounded by so many elite people.

This school was considered one of the best schools in Japan and was where much of the Japanese elite sent their children to study.

These elite included politicians, business conglomerates, and other members of the wealthy class of Japan.

It was also famous for their corrupt entrance standards, which prioritized said elite individuals, and allegations that their study material was not as modern since it was such an old school. Not that Aqua cared too much, since he only ever heard about those things briefly when he watched the news.

The main gate was open and there were students coming in and out. There was a security guard, but he wasn't paying attention to the students and instead reading some kind of manga. It would give Aqua the perfect opportunity to slip in.

Aqua took out Ai's phone and briefly checked her social media. Like many people, she had very relaxed security on her accounts, so even a stranger like Ai's profile could view everything on her feed. One post was a picture of her office which displayed the office number in the back. It would be easy to find, and he knew that she should be working today. She was the school's primary language teacher.

Aqua slipped by the gate in the crowd of students, trying hard not to get stepped on since he was so much shorter than these high school kids.

The inside of the academy was just as beautiful and well-made as the outside. Clearly inspired by western styles of architecture. He remembered taking an optional class on architecture in college, so he recognized some things, but that was so long ago that he barely remembered much of what he learned. His college was dominated by his medical studies and that's really all the information he could recount.

He followed the signs that lead to her office. It was partially opened and easy for him to get in. Aqua snuck his way inside and took a look around.

The office was clean for the most part. It had a smell of incense and candles, though he couldn't see any right now. This place looked way to perfect and clean for what he remembered of her.

Aqua went around her desk and opened a drawer, which of course, was unlocked. He looked inside and almost gagged at what he saw.

"You haven't changed at all Kuro." He said to himself.

Inside was a bunch of very adult oriented manga with the tags he could only describe as "Mind break", "Tentacles", and "BDSM". These are some of the reasons he just never could get along with her. He gets that every person has their own kinks of fetishes, but why on earth would you bring these materials to your work? He had to close the drawer to purge his memory of these mangas.

"Hello?" He heard a gentle feminine voice behind him.

Yup, there she was. Kuro, standing at the door. She looked at him and had her eyebrow raised as she addressed him.

Unlike most of the teachers he saw on his way here, that were dressed in nice formal wear, such as very expensive business suits, she was dressed very differently. She wore a short business skirt that showed off her hose covered legs, a black dress shirt that was partially unbuttoned and showed a bit of her black bra, and high heels that were a bit higher than a teacher at a school should have.

Her black hair was unkempt and fell all the way down to her lower back, clearly only getting a quick brush with very little attempt to style it. Not only that, but she wore very dark eyeliner and purple lipstick.

While the look wasn't too insane, if maybe a little too sexy, what really caught his eye was a BDSM styled collar around her neck that had a bunch of small decorative chains and a rosary attached.

"Good to see you again Kuro." Aqua lied.

"I'm sorry, do I know you?" Kuro asked.

This was the big moment, the moment where he had to convince her of exactly who he was. If anyone would believe him, it would be this nutcase.

"I know you probably don't recognize me right now." Aqua said. "But I'm Goro, from university." He said with a serious voice.

Kuro, expectedly, raised her eyebrow at him. It would take some convincing he knew.

"Well, "Goro"." She put her fingers up in quotations. "You've gotten shorter since we've last seen each other. Is it true men get shorter as they age? But the skin care routine is amazing." She laughed.

"Look Kuro, I know this will sound crazy, but I am Goro. I've been reincarnated." He said.

"Oh?" She asked. "Is that why you went missing? Decided a reset was in order?" She laughed. "Can you tell everyone where your body is, people are very curious."

She was mocking him, thinking this was some dumb prank one of her colleagues made. She seemed very amused at it.

"I actually don't know where my body is, I was murdered, and it was hidden." He said, realizing that this was the first time he said that.

"Very convenient excuse." She laughed. "Ok kid, funs over. Tell mama and papa that the joke was great." She laughed.

"Do you still have that mole on your inner thigh, or did you get it removed yet because I know you always hated it." Aqua said.

"What?" Kuro asked. "How do you know about that?" She blushed.

"Because you always complained about it when we were dating, and I've seen it a lot of times while we were." Aqua said.

She was freaked out now, which was fair since a four-year-old apparently knew such intimate details about her. She grabbed a bottle with a cross on her desk and splashed aqua in the face. He stood there for a moment and spit out the water that got in his mouth.

"Holy water?" He asked. "You do know that demons aren't real." He said.

"Oh, and how does a kid know about my intimate life?" She asked skeptically.

"I told you; I was reincarnated." He said.

"Tell me something else only Goro would know." She said.

"Remember that time you wanted to go to a temple and roleplay with me as a god who came to... you know..." Aqua blushed at the memory. "It was that request that made me break up with you." He said.

There was no way she would have told anyone else that story, and it was something only he knew.

"Goro?" She asked. "You're really reincarnated?" She asked.

"Yes, I am." He said.

"This proves everything!" She said in excitement. "All these years they said I was crazy for being in the occult, yet this just proves it." She said.

"I still think you're crazy." Aqua said.

"Yet here you are, four-years-old again." She laughed.

The only reason he even considered telling her, is because she was always into the occult. If anyone would believe his crazy situation, it would be her. For once, he was glad to finally talk about it.

"So, you were murdered then?" She asked.

"Yea, by a crazed stalker one of my patients had." He said.

"And you didn't let anyone know where your body is?" she asked.

"Even if I did know, which I don't, what am I going to say? How would a toddler know where a murder victim is buried in a region he's never been to?" Well, sort of. He was born there but that doesn't count.

"You could say you had a vision from your past life." She said.

"Right, because normal people would just believe that." He face palmed.

"So, you have all your old memories?" She asked.

"Yes." Aqua said.

"And you breast fed, right?" She asked.

Trust her to focus on that subject.

"At first it was kind of forced on me, but the moment my new mother let me use a bottle I only used that." He said.

"Oh, so you didn't want to enjoy a bit of bonding?" She winked.

"She's my mother, and she was sixteen at the time." He narrowed his eyes.

"But when you think about it, she's not your mother technically." She said. "Do you have any cute sisters who you would go after when you're older?"

Aqua sighed. Seriously, this girl was crazy and couldn't distinguish porn from reality half the time. This was why he broke up with her. When he was in university, he wasn't opposed to experimenting with

a bit of kinky fun. Adding some fluffy handcuffs to a night of romance was fun. But the extent this woman takes it makes him want to gag.

"Taboo relationships aside, I needed to see you because I need help." Aqua said.

"Well, maybe in a few years-"

"Get you mind out of the gutter." He said in an annoyed tone. "I need your language expertise." He said.

"Really? For what?" She asked.

"There's a situation I'm in." Aqua said. "Basically, my new father is trying to kill my new mother, and probably me and my sister too." He explained simply.

"Wow, that is messed up." She said. "And you can't tell anyone because you somehow supernaturally know he's trying to." She deduced.

"Yes." Aqua said. "He's actually responsible for murdering me as Goro since I was collateral to protect my patient."

"Wait..." She cut off.

"What?" Aqua asked.

"Is your patient your new mother?" She asked.

"... Yes..." Aqua crossed his arms and blankly stared at her.

"Wow, so you basically you were your own doctor." She laughed.

"It's weird, I know." He said. "But that's not the point."

"So you know he's responsible because Goro knew, but you can't tell anyone and no one would believe you."

"Exactly." He said. "However, there's a guy who my mother likes that I'm using to basically protect us. Thing is, he's suspicious but a good fighter."

"Who is he?" She asked.

"He's apparently a Ukrainian refugee, but he's fluent in English yet doesn't know written English."

"That is odd." She said.

"I have pictures from his journal, which are written in a language I'm unfamiliar with." He said.

"So, you came to the best language teacher in Japan for help." She smiled. "I'm touched."

"Here's my mother's phone, it has the pictures in the hidden category." He handed Kuro the phone that was now unlocked. "Only look at her hidden photo's."

Kuro however, ignored that and was now curious. She opened the photo's app and instantly went over to the regular albums.

Aqua knew it was a risk giving her the phone, but he had no choice. The gamble did not pay off.

"Wait, she's familiar." Kuro said as she browsed the photos.

"Don't look at her photos!" Aqua yelled but it was too late.

"Your mother is the idol, Ai?" She asked.

"Damn it." He face palmed.

"And she was sixteen when nursing, that explains her medical break a few years ago." She said out loud.

"Yes, it was a teen pregnancy. Please don't say anything." Aqua requested.

"I'm not a huge fan of idols at all, too innocent for me." She shrugged. "But that is interesting, so she's your mother and your father is trying to kill her. This just got dramatic."

"Just read the language." He said.

Kuro sat down at her desk and plugged the phone into her computer. She transferred the pictures from the hidden category to her own file and printed it out to make it easier to read. After returning to her seat with the new pictures, she started to go over them.

"Want to sit on my lap?" She laughed.

"I'll take the table." He said.

Aqua climbed onto her table and watched as she worked. She took a pen, clicked it, and started making notes on the pages. She worked faster than he expected.

"I see, so I can confirm it is a language." She said.

"Really?" Aqua said sarcastically.

"What I mean, is that it is not random. It has a good sentence structure and uses repeating words where you expect to find them." She said. "In English, words like 'or', 'and', or 'the' repeat all the time. That's how you can spot real languages as opposed to fake ones that movies often times doodle."

"If it was in a journal, I guessed that it was real." Aqua said.

"However, even though words repeat, letters do not." She said.

"What do you mean?" He asked.

"Aside from matching words, there are no symbols that repeat often. This implies that the number of letters in this language is a lot more than, let's say English with their 26 letters." She explained.

"So what does that mean?" Aqua asked.

"It could be more similar to something like hieroglyphs, where letters mean things instead of sounds. As an example, "Grape", and "Ape" are two vastly different things, but sound similar, so the words look similar. "Chimp" and "Gorilla" sound different, but in a language like this the words would look similar since they're similar things."

"So that means that there are more letters." Aqua said.

"Exactly." She said. "The first page, which translates numbers, also shows that this numbering system uses repeats of twelve instead of ten."

"Meaning?" Aqua asked.

"There are only ten symbols in English numbers, starting from zero and going to nine. Every ten numbers, the pattern repeats. However, most older languages use repeats at twelve instead of ten. A hold over from this system is the imperial system of measurements. Where twelve inches makes one foot."

"So whatever language this is, it's older?" He asked.

"Exactly." Kuro said.

Amazing that she's able to figure all that out from a few minutes of looking at a language she's unfamiliar with. Maybe that's why this school employed someone as weird as her. Despite her oddities, they might look past that since she is one of the best in the field.

"You said he was Ukrainian?" Kuro asked.

"Yea, from crimea." He said.

"I'm more familiar with Middle Eastern and East Asian languages, but I do know Eastern European languages do not use this family of languages. Come to think of it, I can't identify what family of language this is from." She said.

"Family?" He asked.

"Languages all have families, romantic languages like French, Spanish, and Italian that share a common origin. German and English are from Germanic based families, though English has a lot of Latin inspired roots." She explained. "However, I know very little of African or South American languages, so it's possible it's from there. But I have no idea what this can be classified as."

"So, it's not Eastern European?" Aqua asked.

"I don't want to say absolutely since I don't know much of their dialects. It's possible some ethnic minorities in rural areas can develop their own variations, especially in melting pots like Europe. But as far as I know, it's not associated with any major language in that part of the world."

"This adds to the puzzle." Aqua said.

"Why not get rid of him?" She asked.

"Because he's a good fighter and at least seems to care about Ai. Which is important since right now this kid's father is trying to kill her." He said, referring to himself as if he was a different person.

"I don't envy your position honestly." She said sincerely.

"I'm actually glad to talk about all this supernatural crap with someone other than my sister." He admitted.

"You think it's a good idea to tell a toddler, or is she also reincarnated?" She wondered.

"The second one." Aqua said. "She refuses to tell me about her life beforehand, but I assume she's either a kid before she died or at least a young teenager."

"Do you think Eren could be supernatural in origin?" She asked.

"That's crazy." Aqua dismissed.

"I'm talking to my ex boyfriend, who is now a four-year-old and son of a teenage idol, yet that's weird?" She asked.

"Eto..." Aqua thought.

"What else is weird about him?" She asked.

"He has no concept of modern technology or cultures. He's also vague, but I'm not sure if he's hiding his past or just doesn't know about the world. He didn't even know what a smart phone was." He said.

"Sounds like he may have been reincarnated." She said.

"He's an adult, he should have been reborn as a child." Aqua said.

"So you know the rules of how this works?" She asked. "Did your sister die the same time she was born?"

"I don't think so." Aqua wondered. "There was a gap, at least, I think. She didn't know a lot of very recent events. Like she died a few years prior to being reborn."

"So, is it possible that Eren follows different rules as well? Maybe the gap between his rebirth is a lot longer than a few years." Kuro suggested.

"Why do these theories make sense?" He wondered out loud.

"I'm a scholar, that's why." She smiled.

"I can't ask him though. If I'm wrong, that could cause issues." He said.

"You're wrong?" She asked. "I came up with the theory." She crossed her arms in annoyance.

"Fine, if you're wrong." He sighed. "Can we stay focused?" He asked.

"For now, I'll send this to a few friends of mine and see if they can see something I missed. There are a lot of languages in the world, and I'll need to get a diversity of expertise. Even I don't know every language." She said.

"I'll also need to contact Ai and make sure she's not going to kill me for sneaking away." Aqua said.

"You snuck away?" Kuro asked.

"Yea, it's kind of hard to go places and meet people alone as a four-year-old. So, I used a visit to the hospital to sneak away to see you." He said.

"Awww." She said. "Do you still have feelings for me?" She laughed.

"Feelings of disgust." He said.

"Well, I'll have to get in contact with her and let her know you're here, as well as speak with the faculty so as to avoid any potential allegations of kidnapping." She said.

"You can call the contact in her phone labeled Miyako or Meimei." He said.

"Until then, we need to put you somewhere else. I can't have a child in my office." She said.

"Worried about your porn stash?" He asked.

"What?" She asked nervously. "I don't have a stash like-"

Aqua opened the drawer, showing the pornographic manga in her drawer.

"Fine, yes. I can't have you seeing that." She said.

"Believe me, I don't want to." He said.

"I'll drop you off at the Student Council Room. The Student Council President, Shirogane Miyuki, will be able to watch over you." She said.

"Great, so I have to spend time with a bunch of self centered brats?" He asked.

"Didn't you say you tried to run for student council in your old school?" She asked.

"And I got kicked out of the running." He said.

"You were going through a delinquent phase." She said. "At least this time your hair is naturally blonde instead of dyed." She laughed.

"That was one year Kuro." He said. "I grew out of that dumb phase."

"Either way, they'll need to watch you while we're busy. They're good kids too, a bit dense sometimes, but good." She said.

"Dense?" He asked.

"We have a bet in the faculty lounge on whether the President of Vice President will confess their love first. It's a bet that's been going on for a while." She laughed.

"Isn't that a bit creepy?" Aqua asked.

"It's cute." She laughed.

"I wouldn't imagine you are the kind of person who likes cute." He said in a deadpanned voice.

"Let's just go so I can call your mother." She said. "I like this job and don't want to get in trouble for keeping a child in my office who might get reported missing."

"Fair enough." Aqua replied. "However, we'll need a wat to continue talking, and no offense, I doubt my mother would actually let me spend any time with you." He said.

"You know, most men say that about me." She winked.

"Just stop." Aqua face palmed again.

"I'll come up with some kind of excuse, or just visit you late at night." She said.

"If you get arrested, that's on you." Aqua said.

"Oh, such little faith."

Ai was running around outside with Eren right on her tail. Miyako and Meimei used the car to do a search around the roads of the hospital, while Ai and Eren ran around the sidewalks and parks to find Aqua.

Eren insisted on getting out of the wheelchair to help her find him, which she didn't complain about since right now, Aqua's safety took priority over Eren's in her mind. As much as she cares about Eren, Aqua comes first.

Ruby stayed with Miyako since she was too small to keep up with the two adults, though she did look worried since she didn't know where Aqua was either.

"It'll be ok Ai." Eren said reassuredly.

"But he's alone somewhere!" She almost yelled.

"He's a tough kid." Eren said.

"No he's not, he's tiny and vulnerable!" She panicked. "What if he got taken by kidnappers, or maybe someone knows who I am and will use him against me. What if he just got lost and now he's completely unprotected!?"

"Ai, listen to me." Eren said as he grabbed her shoulder and turned her to face him.

Her eyes widened at the sudden action, in the back of her mind she felt like she was a leaf compared to his strength, even when he was hurt.

"You need to calm down." He said as he pat her shoulder. "You can't let fear or panic overpower you right now. You need to think clearly and remain calm, otherwise you'll miss obvious things."

"Y-you're right." She said as she looked down. "I-I'm just so scared. I don't know w-what I would do i-if." Her eye's started to tear up.

"You'll be ok, and he will too." Eren said. "You said yourself that he showed little fear with that stalker guy. He's clearly strong and brave and he will be fine." Eren said.

"Y-yea, you're right." Ai said as she wiped her tears under her sunglasses. "I just need to stay calm."

"We'll go look for one of those police officer and they can probably help."

"O-ok." Ai said.

Ai and Eren walked up to a cop, who was walking along the busy street. Ai went up to him, hoping that he wouldn't get suspicious of her disguise, and got his attention.

" *Can I help you miss?* " The officer said.

" I-I'm looking for my son. " She said as she held up a picture from her wallet of Aqua. " He's gone missing and I can't find him. "

" Yea, I know that kid. " He said.

" You do!?" Ai yelled. " Where is he? Is he ok? Did he look hurt? Did he- "

" Ma'am, please calm down. " He said. " You're asking too many questions. I saw him alone walking down that way. When I confronted him, he ran. I think he ran over there, but we're looking for him. "

" Please, let us help. I need to find him. " She said. " Was he running from someone? " She asked.

" No, just me. " The officer laughed. " I think he's just being a little trouble maker. Don't worry, we'll get him back to you soon. You can help look, but please don't get in the way. "

" Of course. " Ai said as she turned to Eren. "Aqua-Chan went this way. We'll go follow the road and see if we can find him."

"No problem." Eren said.

Ai ran up the street, her years of dancing making the jog easy for her. Eren was able to easily keep up, not at all slowed down by his injuries. Even if she was tired, her maternal instincts forced her to push on in order to find her precious baby.

Ai was terrified and didn't know what to do. She just wanted to find Aqua and make sure he was ok. She might have to give him a stern talking to, but she needed to make sure that he was ok. Any thoughts of punishments can wait until after he was safe.

Despite the injuries Eren had, the jog was easy. He was just as worried for the kid as Ai was. Aqua seemed like a good kid and he didn't want to see Ai hurt. She seemed so worried about her child

and Eren wondered if he often made his own mother this worried as a kid when he would get in fights or be brought back to the house by the MPs.

" *Excuse me.* " Ai called to a random woman.

" *Can I help you?* " The young woman asked.

The young woman was wearing what looked like a high school uniform with the jacket tied around her waist. She had long blonde hair that was tied into a side pony tail.

" *Please, I'm looking for my son. Have you seen him?* " Ai held up the picture again.

" *Hmmm.* " The girl thought to herself.

She looked at the picture carefully, wondering where she saw him before.

" *Oh, that must be the child my lady was talking about.* " She said.

" *You've seen him?* " Ai asked.

The woman took out her phone and showed a recent text message she received.

Sorry, can you get me from school? We'll be a little late because of this kid that ran away from home.

Are you sure Fujiwara wasn't involved?

Not this time, no.

There was a picture of a bunch of teenagers in school uniforms that were posing with a young boy. That young boy was Aqua, who looked completely uncomfortable being there.

" *That's him!* " Ai yelled out.

" I'll send a message that we found his mother. I can escort you to the Student Council Room if you would like. " The woman said.

" Yes, please. Thank you so much. " Ai said. *" Is he ok? "*

" Aside from probably being pestered he Student Council, I'm sure he's fine. " She said.

"Thank you, I'm sorry, what's your name?" Ai asked.

" It's Hayasaka Ai ." She said.

" Ai, huh? " Ai thought that was funny. *" Thank's for the help Hayasaka-San. "*

" Of course. " She said.

Ai calmed down a bit, knowing that not only was Aqua safe, but she would have him in her arms again. It made her feel so much better. Since her phone was missing, she borrowed Eren's phone and sent a text to Miyako in order to let her know that Aqua was safe.

"Hey Ai." Eren called to her.

"Yes?" Ai asked.

"What's wrong?" Ai asked.

Both women looked at each other briefly, Hayasaka had a raised eyebrow.

" Your name is Ai too? " Hayasaka asked.

" Yea, and I guess you know English. " Ai laughed.

"I was going to ask, what's going on." Eren said.

"Oh right, I keep forgetting." She said.

Ai explained the conversation that she had with Hayasaka, as well as that Aqua was safe and sound. Eren felt glad at that, happy that the kid was safe and that Ai wasn't so worried anymore.

" *So, are you Ai from B-Komachi?* " Hayasaka asked.

Her eyes widened as the young schoolgirl instantly found out who she was. Even worse, Hayasaka knew that she had a son. How much worse can today get? Eren got hurt, Aqua decided to run away like a little delinquent, and now a second person today knows that she has a kid. This stupid disguise didn't work at all today.

" *Well...* " She tried to say.

" *Don't worry, I can understand if you want to keep it secret.* " Hayasaka said. " *Epecially that you have a child. I promise I won't tell anyone.* "

" *Thank you.* " Ai said in a low voice, the excitement of today making her feel weak and tired.

" *My lady who is with your son, she is Shinomiya Kaguya, the heir to the Shinomiya conglomerate.* " Hayasaka explained.

" *Really?* " Ai asked.

" *I figured that I should tell you since you're going to meet her. But you have nothing to fear. I keep her secrets as well since she is often a target. So, she and I will completely understand your situation to wanting to remain entirely hidden.* " Hayasaka explained.

" *Thank you.* " Ai said.

" *However, I hope you won't mind giving some of the Student Council members autographs, they are actually big fans.* " Hayasaka said. " *I-I kind of am too.* " She said with a blush and turned her head away from Ai.

" Well, of course. " Ai smiled. " I would love to give you all autographs. Especially after you guys kept my son safe. "

Ai felt more relaxed. The cat was out of the bag, but thankfully, this Shinomiya girl was just as popular as she was, maybe more so. That meant she at least has an understanding of personal privacy and why it's important that no one knows about her son.

Ai realized that she shouldn't have looked for Aqua if she wanted to keep her identity a secret, but her rational mind was completely overtaken by panic. Besides, who cares about a career when their child is in danger.

One thing was for sure though, Aqua was going to be in huge trouble. Now that her rational mind was back, she would make sure he never hears the end of it. She swore that she would show him no mercy in this punishment, especially for running away.

" So, is he the father? He's kind of attractive. " Hayasaka whispered to Ai.

Ai blushed furiously and denied that question instantly.

Yea, the "her" was an OC, but there's a lot of references in this one. I figured it would be fun since Love is War is written by the same guy that did Oshi No Ko, and Kaguya even has a cameo with Ruby lol.

Next chapter will also have some humor too, specifically a bit of that Love is War humor. Or at least, I'll attempt to. Let's see if it actually works lol.

Though now, Aqua is playing with the idea that maybe Eren has a similar problem to him. However, he won't address it yet.

As for Kuro, I wanted to experiment with a character that's kind of like Darkness from Konosuba. So, she's very weird and odd lol. Hope she was interesting if nothing else lol.

Hope you guys enjoyed this one.

Ai is Mad at Aqua

Chapter 22: Ai is Mad at Aqua

Aqua and Kuro stood outside the Student Council Room, which was a massive door that Aqua felt was bigger than even a shipping warehouse door. The door was just massive. Did they get a workout just opening this? At his current age, he felt like he'd be trapped by the weight of the door if he was left alone in there.

Kuro opened the door with very minor difficulty and entered inside. The room was more like an office, which made sense since this was the Student Council. The furniture looked expensive and there were decorations everywhere.

"Kuro-Sensie, to what do we owe the pleasure?" A feminine voice said in a very formal way.

"Shinomiya, it is good to see you dear." Kuro smiled.

Aqua could kind of tell that the Student Council felt a little uncomfortable around Kuro, which didn't surprise Aqua. Kuro may be tolerated here because of her intelligence, but it doesn't change that she's still weird.

There were four teenagers in the room, a blonde haired young man behind the desk, dressed in a school uniform with a golden necklace of some kind. Near the desk, standing with a cup of tea, was a dark haired girl that he vaguely felt was familiar. This was a famous school for the children of Japan's elite, so he probably saw her once in the paper or the news.

On the couch was a pink haired girl in the same schoolgirl uniform messing with a board game. Next to her, was a boy with long dark

hair that covered his face and a slouched posture that looked like it hurt his back.

"We have a little problem that we need help with." Kuro said.

"We'd be happy to help." A blonde man said from behind the desk.

"This young boy ran away from home and got lost in the academy." Kuro explained.

"How did he get in?" The blonde guy asked.

"We don't know, but we're trying to contact his mother and need you to watch over him until we do." Kuro explained.

"He's so cute!"

Suddenly, a pink blur ran over to Aqua and scooped him up. Aqua yelped as he was immediately crushed in the arms of a very energetic girl. Aqua began to suffocate as his face was buried by her very large breasts.

Why are her breasts so big anyway?

"Fujiwara, you're hurting him!" Shinomiya said.

"But he's adorable!" She yelled back.

She relaxed her grip, allowing Aqua to take a breath after nearly suffocating. Fujiwara hoisted him up so he straddled the side of her hip as she held him like a child, which he was.

"Please put me down." Aqua requested.

"Wow, your Japanese is so good!" She said in a baby like voice.

"He's such a smart little guy."

"Anyway." Kuro got their attention. "I'll need you guys to watch over him while we try to find his mother."

"We'll handle it." The blonde guy said.

Kuro walked out of the club, leaving Aqua alone with the crazy pink haired girl and her friends.

"Hi little guy, I'm Fujiwara Chika, what's your name?" Fujiwara asked.

"You can just call me Kaguya." Kaguya smiled.

"I'm Miyuki." The blonde guy said.

"I'm Ishigami." A guy sitting on the couch said, paying very little attention.

"What's your name?" Fujiwara asked.

"Aqua." He said.

"Wow, cool name." Miyuki said.

No, it isn't.

"Is it because of your eyes?" Kaguya asked. "They're so pretty." She smiled.

"Yes." He said. "Can you please put me down?"

"We need a picture!" Fujiwara said in excitement.

"No we don't!" Aqua yelled.

"Ishigami, can you please take the picture?" Kaguya asked.

"Sure." He shrugged.

"I'll put him in the middle!" Fujiwara said in excitement.

With no care for his own opinion, the group of teens forced him to sit in the center of the couch as they took a picture. He was squeezed

between the two women as Miyuki stayed on the side. With a small flash, the picture was taken.

"I'll need to send this to my ride home, since we may have to stay later." Kaguya said as she sent the picture through her phone.

"Yea, until we find his mom." Fujiwara said. "Do you want to join the Student Council Aqua-Chan?" Fujiwara smiled.

"No." He said.

"Can I hold him?" Kaguya asked.

He's four, not a freaking baby. Can't they just do what they were doing and leave him alone?

"Sure." Fujiwara smiled as she handed Aqua over to Kaguya.

Kaguya set him down in her lap as she stayed seated.

"So, President, have you ever thought about what kind of kids you wanted?" Kaguya asked sweetly.

"Well-" Suddenly, Miyuki froze.

Aqua looked at him as he started to get nervous, as if he was trying to figure out a puzzle of defuse a bomb. What was with him? It's only a minor question.

Kaguya on the other hand, looked up at him slyly, as if she was messing with him. She had a sweet yet coy smile on her face as she looked at Miyuki.

"I have no time to think about that, I have to focus on school too much. That's still a long ways away." He said nervously.

"But surely you must have imagined it." Kaguya said sweetly.

She held Aqua closer to her, as if she was almost posing with him. Aqua looked back and forth between the two teenagers and wondered what was going on. It's like they're playing a mental game with each other.

"Maybe imagined who you would want that child to be." Kaguya said.

"I am simply too busy for that." Miyuki suddenly got more confidence. "But what about you Shinomiya?" He turned the question to her.

"Me?" Kaguya asked.

"As the heir to the Shinomiya conglomerate-" She's the what? "You would need to ensure that one day you have a kid of your own, so that begs the question, what would you need to have?"

"W-well-" Kaguya stuttered. "Obviously I'd need to make sure my kid is well educated." She said.

"But what about a husband?" Miyuki asked.

"H-husband?" She stuttered.

"You'd need to consider what kind of man you'd need to marry, after all, he would be with you in the conglomerate, right?" Miyuki asked.

"Well-" She tried to say.

"So, what kind of man would you marry?" He was starting to sound like a villain.

"Yea Kaguya." Fujiwara chimed in. "What kind of guy would you want to marry?"

Kaguya was frozen, completely unsure of what she should say. She squeezed Aqua a little bit due to the nervousness she felt.

Is this what Kuro meant by their bet on who would confess first? Are they really so shy that they have to do these dumb mind games?

Can't they just say it out loud and get over their shyness?

Aqua was never this shy in school in his previous life. He wasn't exactly popular with girls, but it's not that hard to go on a few dates or just ask a girl out. He's had a few relationships before his death, just never married any of them.

These two though, were completely helpless.

"No one would be crazy enough to marry Shinomiya." Ishigami said.

"Excuse me?" Kaguya's shy demeanor morphed into a scary and murderous one.

"She's too strict on how she spends her time, anyone she marries would get stuck working for her business, and she wouldn't have time to actually do anything. Not to mention she doesn't have very sweet or motherly instincts."

Aqua could instantly tell the kind of guy Ishigami was. Honest to a fault, and completely lacking in social cues.

Aqua felt himself get lifted from Kaguya's lap and placed into Fujiwara's lap. Kaguya stood up and walked over to Ishigami.

"What?" He said, not realizing the danger he was in.

LINEBREAK

After that whole issue, Aqua was sitting down on the couch as the council went through their end of the day work. Minus Ishigami, who was busy cleaning the shelves for the third time after getting an earful from Kaguya.

"Hey, Aqua-Chan." Fujiwara called.

"Yes?" He asked.

"What do you think of the Academy, do you think you ever want to attend?" She asked.

"No." He said.

"Really, why not?" Kaguya asked. "In a few years, if your grades are good, I could put a word in to the school to accept your application."

And be surrounded by a school of the nation's elite? No thank you.

"I honestly think I'd rather be a doctor or something." He said.

Aqua wouldn't mind going back into his old job. He loved being a doctor and especially helping women give birth. The look on a new mother's face as she has her first child was something he always looked forward to.

"What a sweet thing!" Fujiwara said. "He wants to help people."

"Even then, being a doctor will be tough." Miyuki said.

"I know." Aqua said.

"It requires a lot of studying. You'll want to make sure your grades are up to par."

Aqua had to remind himself that these teenagers are just trying to be nice. There's no way they could know that he already went through medical school and is already a certified doctor.

"I'm sure I'll learn over time." Aqua said.

"He sounds so confident." Fujiwara smiled. "He might actually do it one day."

Suddenly, Kaguya's phone vibrated, and she took it out of her pocket. She looked at the screen and read the message for a moment. Aqua saw her face light up in excitement.

"Wow!" She said in excitement.

"What?" Miyuki asked.

"My... driver, said that his mom is coming over to get him." She said.

"Ok." Ishigami said skeptically. "Why are you so excited?"

"It's Ai from B-Komachi!"

"What!?" Aqua yelled.

How the hell does she know? Did Ai throw caution to the wind and just tell some random person that she's an idol? Now their secret is completely out in the open.

"Really?" Miyuki asked.

"That's so cool!" She said in excitement.

"Wait, Ai has a child?" Miyuki asked as he turned towards Aqua.

"Et-" he said before...

"Wow!" Fujiwara scooped him up again. "Your mama is famous!"

"Let go!" He yelled from the extremely hyper girl.

"My driver said to please keep it secret, since she could get in a scandal if she's found out to have a child." Kaguya said, reading the new messages on the phone.

"That's no problem." Fujiwara said. "My dad is a politician, so we're used to those kinds of things." She said.

"Yea, I have no issues with that." Miyuki said. "It's nice to hear that she actually has a family. I heard it can be tough for idols."

"Still, we get to meet Ai." Kaguya said excitedly.

"Yea, I've watched every one of her shows since I was a kid." Miyuki said.

"Huh?" Kaguya asked.

"Yea, I've been a fan since her debut." He said. "Come to think of it, that explains her medical break four years ago." He said, looking at Aqua.

"Idols are a complete waste of time." Ishigami said.

"Huh?" Fujiwara asked.

"They're lying and manipulative people who sell a fake personality in order to win over people and get money. They create a fake persona and don't show their real selves and create a culture of rabid fans and obsessed fan boys who waste their lives away. The whole idol culture is a stain on our society." Ishigami said.

Talk about bringing down the mood.

"Well, we'll just ignore him." Fujiwara said.

"You're not even going to acknowledge what I said!?" He said sadly.

"We've got to make sure everything is clean!" Miyuki ordered.

"Ishigami, keep cleaning the desks. Fujiwara, vacuum, Kaguya and I will make sure the couches are clean from any crumbs."

"Yes Sir!" Fujiwara said.

"Of course President." Kaguya said gently.

"Aqua, we'll need your help too." Miyuki said. "Go and clean off the desks and make sure it's organized." He flashed a thumbs up and a charming smile.

"No." Aqua said.

"But-"

"I'm not interested in cleaning your guys mess to see my own mother. If anything, I'm going to get in trouble when she sees me. But thanks for watching me." He said.

These kids were completely insane to him. But, at least they were nice and understanding of Ai's situation. Ishigami was his only worry, since he reminded him a bit of Ryosuke, but he's harmless. He seems like he hates idols in general and doesn't care for it. So that was a relief. He was socially awkward, but harmless.

Right as they finished cleaning, Ai walked through the door.

He wasn't worried. Ai wasn't the kind of woman to get upset or angry, maybe a light punishment like last time.

He was so wrong.

"Thank you so much for the escort Hayasaka-San." Ai said as she was escorted to the front gate of the academy.

"I'll have to wait here, since my lady needs an escort home." Hayasaka said. "Our driver was told to head home since she was going to be late, so I'll need to stay here."

"I understand." Ai smiled.

" *And it was nice meeting you Eren-San.* " Hayasaka said in English.

" *Sure.* " He nodded back, his own way of returning the goodbye.

"I hope you enjoy the autograph." Ai said.

"I will." Hayasaka blushed. "I look forward to the concert this Saturday. I heard you can get a shot at the Tokyo Dome if it goes well."

"That's what they say, but we'll see." Ai laughed.

After parting ways, Eren and Ai walked through the academy gates and followed the directions to the Student Council Room.

Eren was looking around, as if taking in all the detail. The Academy had a very similar look to the palace in the Interior, where Historia became the queen. It wasn't as nicely decorated but had the same general idea with the large windows on the wall. Clearly, this place of learning was for the wealthier people in this country.

Ai marveled at the academy. She never did much schooling since she spent so much time as an idol. In terms of her education, she was somewhat lacking. Ai wasn't dumb by any means, but she was very uneducated compared to many other Japanese people her age. Most of her skill sets came from dancing, singing, and acting. Outside of that, she'd struggle to find real work.

Still, this academy was amazing. She'd love to study here if she was ever reborn or something. It had such a nice smell and presence that it made her feel welcomed.

"Wow, big door." Ai said out loud.

" *Were you talking to me?* " Eren asked.

"Sorry." She laughed. " *I said it's a big door.* "

Eren just shrugged.

Ai opened the door to the room and saw inside. Normally, she'd marvel at the design and cleanliness of the place but was not at all focused on any of that. She was only focused on the small child standing in the center of the room.

"Hey Ai-" Aqua almost fell over as Ai slammed into him.

Ai almost slid on her knees as she kneeled down to hold him. The worry from earlier finally leaving her shoulders as she held her son in

her arms possessively and protectively. A weak and low breath escaped her lips as she forced herself to relax.

"Are you ok Aqua-Chan?" She asked as she started moving him around to inspect him.

"I'm fine." He said.

Ai tilted his head around and moved his arms to inspect every part of his body. Were there any bruises, was he skinny from skipping a meal? Was he well hydrated? Did all his joints work?

"Are you sure?" She asked cautiously.

"Yes." He said.

She sighed in relief. He was safe and sound, no injury or damage. She was so relived that he was ok.

Aqua predicted this reaction. She always worried about him, especially after Ryosuke. So, he knew that he would be fine and maybe get a small grounding.

"What The Hell Were You Thinking!?" Ai screamed.

"I-"

"I don't want to hear it!" She yelled again, causing everyone in the room to cover their ears. "Do you have any idea how worried I was!? What made you think of running away!?"

Truthfully, he had no lie prepared. It was a target of opportunity, a chance to be close to the academy to meet with Kuro, that he had very little planned. He saw an opportunity and took it.

But he did not expect Ai's reaction.

"You're grounded!" She yelled. "You won't be allowed outside until you're an adult!"

Ai was just releasing all of the fear she felt. She wanted to throw this child out the window. She wanted to spank him or hit him with her shoe to make sure he fully understood how worried she was. She had so many punishments that she didn't intend to give him, but once she calmed down, she'd give him a more appropriate punishment.

"Sorry?" Aqua tried.

"Sorry doesn't cut it!" She said angrily. "You're never leaving my sight again! I don't care if I have to bring you on the stage to keep you in my sight!"

Never in his two lives, did Aqua believe that Ai would be capable of getting so angry. If he was a child, he might cry.

Actually, crying could-

"Don't even think about fake crying!" She caught on.

Damn.

"I'm sorry Ai." He said.

"I forgave you a while ago, but you're still in trouble." She said.

Suddenly, Ai remembered that there were other people in the room. The Student Council were standing in the corner of the room, clearly terrified of the short woman. Eren was leaning on the doorway, waiting patiently for Ai to finish her disciplining.

"Sorry." She said as she stood up. "I didn't mean for you to see that."

"It's quite alright." Kaguya said. "I completely understand."

"Yea, he did kind of deserve it." Fujiwara said.

"He's a delinquent and you should watch out for him." Ishigami said.

Dick, Aqua thought.

"Thank you so much for watching him." Ai smiled, her personality switching to her idol persona.

"It was our pleasure." Kaguya said.

"At least we got to meet you, it's a real honor to meet you." Fujiwara said.

"I've been a fan since I was a kid." Miyuki said. "Since you debut almost eight years ago."

"Well, I am always glad to meet fans." Ai said cheerfully.

"Is that your husband?" Fujiwara pointed to Eren. "He's really handsome." She said.

"Oh, no. He's a friend." Ai waved off.

"Who is your husband?" Fujiwara asked.

"Fujiwara, that is a private thing to ask." Kaguya said.

"Oh, sorry." She said.

"You're a single mom?" Miyuki asked.

"President!" Kaguya berated.

"Well, yes I am." Ai said. "It's a secret I have to keep for my career."

"Why stay in, if you don't mind me asking?" Miyuki asked.

"Well, I love being an idol." She smiled and flashed a peace sign.

"Bringing love and happiness to people with my singing and dancing fills me with joy. I am lucky to have so many dedicated fans."

The entire Student Council swooned over Ai. Her terrifying motherly anger was so far from their mind now and all they could see was the beautiful idol in front of them.

"I heard you're the next in line for the Shinomiya conglomerate." Ai said, pointing to Kaguya.

"I am." Kaguya said.

"That must be a big responsibility." She said.

"You have no idea." Miyuki laughed.

"What about you?" Ai asked. "You must be the son of someone important."

"No, I'm actually a normal guy." He said. "I had the top testing scores and was allowed to enter. Truthfully, my financial situation isn't the best."

"That's amazing." Ai smiled as she patted his chest. "You must be so smart."

Miyuki blushed at the compliment. Kaguya saw the blush and suddenly started to feel jealous. She made a small pout that was barely noticeable, however, Ai noticed it.

She smiled coyly as she realized what was going on. Kaguya was obviously having feeling for Miyuki and was worried about Ai. It was kind of cute.

"Are you and lady Kaguya dating?" Ai asked.

"W-what?" Miyuki stuttered.

"O-of course not!" Kaguya denied. "I mean, there are a million of other things I need to do besides date. I couldn't possibly ever date him right now- I mean ever! Ever."

Ai wanted to squeal. They were so cute trying to deny each other's attraction.

"Of course." Ai giggled. "Even if you two look so cute together." She pushed.

"C-cute?" Kaguya blushed.

"I mean, if Shinomiya wants to admit her attraction to me, then I won't deny her request. It would be ungentlemanly." He said.

"The gentlemanly thing to do would be confessing any attraction you might have first. If I had to, I would accept any invitation from him, mostly out of pity." She said.

Ai would believe that, if they weren't currently blushing and looking away from each other. It was so cute and made her miss her teenage years, ignoring the fact that she's only two or three years older than the.

"So, sir, why are you so hurt?" Fujiwara asked Eren.

Thank goodness, a distraction, both Kaguya and Miyuki thought. Ai pouted as her little show just ended.

"Sir, are you ok?" Fujiwara asked.

"He doesn't know Japanese Fujiwara-San." Ai explained.

"Oh, that's easy." She said. " *Why are you so hurt?* " She switched to English.

" *Work accident.* " He shrugged.

" *You're a foreigner, right?* " She asked. " *What country are you from? America?* "

" *Ukraine.* " He said.

" Really, where? " She asked. " I went to Kiev once, though it was lower on my list of trips personally. I love Dubai more, but where'd you grow up? "

" Crimea. " Eren said.

" Oh cool, what's it like? " She asked.

"Fujiwara, that's enough questioning." Kaguya said.

"Why, I'm just curious." She said.

"Because Crimea is not a place he probably wants to talk about." She said.

"Why?" She asked.

"Eren was a victim of the invasion of Crimea." Ai said.

"There was an invasion?" Fujiwara asked.

"How did you not hear?" Miyuki asked. "Your dad is a politician!"

"Because it's so boring!" She said. "I hate it when I hear my dad talk about work. International politics can just get so boring sometimes."

"He was conscripted in the Russian army, so-" Ai was interrupted.

" Ai, please stop talking about me. " Eren said.

" Sorry. " She said.

"I thought you didn't know Japanese?" Fujiwara asked Eren.

Eren stayed quiet, not sure what she was saying to him.

" Do you know Japanese or not? " Fujiwara asked in English.

" No, but I can read context clues. " He said. " Despite what people say, I'm not stupid. " He looked away in annoyance.

" I'm sorry. " Fujiwara said sadly. " I guess I was curious, I like meeting foreigners, and you're pretty handsome too. " She blushed.

Now Ai narrowed her eyes at Fujiwara, worried that she had a crush on Eren. Fujiwara was probably two or three years younger than Eren, which would be completely fine for dating. Fujiwara also had a huge advantage over Ai, two advantages to be specific.

Kaguya noticed. So, she did like him? This could be some good payback for what Ai just did to her.

"He is handsome, it's amazing that Ai-San hasn't dated him yet."
Kaguya smiled slyly.

"W-what do you mean? We aren't dat-" Ai stopped as she realized what Kaguya just did.

Ai glared at Kaguya, who smiled in triumph. Both women burst into giggling at the little moment they shared, admiring each other's ability to prank the other.

Aqua looked between the two women and wondered what was going on. Was there some secret language they shared that he didn't understand?

"Well, we should leave." Ai said after recovering from her giggling. Before we do, I'll share my number." She said.

"Really?" Miyuki asked.

"I can give you guys backstage tickets, plus autographs if you want as well." She said.

"That would be awesome!" Kaguya said in excitement.

"Yea, we get to go live to a B-Komachi concert!" Fujiwara exclaimed.

"We still have to pay." Kaguya said.

"No, it's a gift." Ai said.

"Please, I understand that idols don't make much, and I am very wealthy. I will pay for everyone's tickets. At least let me have that honor." She said.

"Ok, I'll allow you to." Ai giggled.

" *Would Eren-San like to go as well?* " Kaguya asked in English.

" *Go where?* " He asked.

" *My next concert.* " Ai explained.

" *I don't have a choice, so sure.* " He shrugged.

" *Nope, you don't.* " Ai laughed.

After saying their goodbyes, Eren, Ai, and Aqua left the room and made their way home. Ai got her phone back and called Miyako to come get them from the academy.

The Council did some last minute things before they left as well. Kaguya made her way to the gate, where Hayasaka was waiting. Hayasaka was leaning against the gate as she walked over. She was on her phone, browsing social media.

"I hope you enjoyed your meeting with Ai." Hayasaka said.

"It was pretty amazing." Kaguya said. "I'm glad to meet her, we got some tickets and I'd like for you to come as well."

"I'd be honored lady Kaguya." Hayasaka said, hiding her excitement.

"Where's the driver?" She asked.

"He couldn't wait long, so I told him to go home and I'd escort you home." She said. "He had a family emergency, plus we could use the walk."

"Then it can't be helped." She waved off. Hayasaka made the right call, since the mental welfare of her servants was an important thing to Kaguya.

"That Eren guy was strange to me." Hayasaka said.

"He did seem hurt." Kaguya said.

"Those injuries weren't from a work accident." Hayasaka said.

"What do you mean?" She asked.

"I talked with Ai, she said he got those from a collapse at work." She said. "But I'm medically trained in case I have to treat you for an emergency. Those wounds were caused by fighting, not a collapse."

"Why would they lie?" Kaguya asked.

"I don't think she was lying, I think he lied to her." Hayasaka said.

"I think you're overanalyzing it." Kaguya waved off.

Kaguya saw movement to her left. A white van pulled up right next to her and Hayasaka, stopping for a moment.

Before either woman could react, the door opened and two men came up from an alley behind them and pushed them towards the open door. Kaguya tried to scream but a scarf was placed over her mouth before she could make a sound.

Hayasaka tried to fight the men off, using her basic self defense skills to try and fight them off, but they were too strong and surprised her before she could react. She was shoved into the van as the men got on top of both of them to pin them down.

The scarf was tied between their teeth, muffling any kind of protest or call for help. Their arms were bound behind them with handcuffs and a bag was placed over both of their heads, completely blocking their vision.

Kaguya tried desperately to scream, do anything to let someone know she was in danger. The door to the van was closed and she felt the van start driving away.

"Careful, Oyabun Yoshida only needs the rich one." She heard a voice say.

"Calm down, I got them silenced." Another voice said.

"What about her friend?" He asked.

"We'll just have to bring her, this was not planned very well so we'll need to take her. We'll get rid of her later." A voice said.

Kaguya struggled harder when she heard that. Get rid of Hayasaka!? Absolutely not! She had to get help, she didn't want anything to happen to her loyal servant and friend.

"Good thing the Akuma No Ko got her alone." One said.

The Akuma No Ko!? The westerner who was working with the Yakuza and killed thirty people last night? She never even saw a westerner... unless.

Hayasaka struggled as well, coming to the same conclusion. To her, it made sense. Eren was a westerner and had fresh injuries that were related to fighting. Was this a trap? Was he manipulating Ai and her son to get lady Kaguya alone so they could kidnap her?

"Calm down, we have no interest in hurting you Shinomiya. You're just a piece in a game." One man said as Kaguya struggled.

"You girl, not so lucky." A man said to Hayasaka.

"For now, do what we say, and we won't hurt your friend." A man said.

Kaguya relented, relaxing and following their orders so as to spare Hayasaka from danger.

"We'll keep her for now, she can be used to keep rich girl compliant." He said.

Neither girl could do anything as they were driven away to an unknown fate.

Bet you weren't expecting that lol. Yup, Kaguya and Hayasaka were kidnapped. Hope you guys didn't think this was going to just be a one time cameo lol. There will be consequences.

One thing I like in writing crossovers is the butterfly effect idea. Eren influences the story by his presence. Because the Yakuza were watching him, they saw a moment where Kaguya was alone, because Aqua caused her to be late coming home and put in a vulnerable position.

As for why they kidnapped her, that's a secret for now lol.

Hope this was a good chapter and I hope I got the Love is War humor lol. It's a difficult kind of humor to replicate, so I hope it ended up making a few people laugh lol.

Eren Spars with Hikaru

Chapter 23: Eren Spars with Hikaru

Ai stretched her back as she woke up from her sleep. Ruby was in her arms, waking up herself. Ai felt around for Aqua, who was also in her arms last night, but he wasn't anywhere to be found.

"Aqua?" She asked, looking around.

"I'm awake." He said, reading her phone from where he was sitting on the edge of the Futon.

Unlike normally, where Ai allowed him to be away from her when they slept, tonight she made sure to hold him after the scare she had yesterday. Ai felt terrified that at any moment he could disappear, so she wanted to keep him safe and secure in her arms.

"Your phone privileges are still revoked." She said as she took her phone from him.

Aqua grumbled but didn't do anything to resist as it was taken from him. Ai would have thought it was cute if she wasn't still mad at him.

She never needed to forgive him, he's her son after all, so there's not a single moment where she didn't love him-

Wait, what did she just think? That thought didn't feel untrue in her mind.

Anyway, although she didn't need to forgive him, she was still going to be mad at him for a while. She swore she would be much stricter with him.

"Ai, I'm hungry. Can we please eat?" He pleaded in a cute voice.

And there goes her anger-no! Stay angry. Don't let him off so easily for scaring her.

"Of course, Aqua-Chan." Ai smiled warmly.

Damn it Ai, you failed! Don't let that cute face deceive you!

Ai got up from her Futon and went into the main room. She heard a light snoring coming from her couch. Eren was laying on it, getting some much-needed rest after the accident. His upper body was exposed while his legs were covered by a light blanket. Ai blushed since he went to sleep in only his pants and no shirt, showing off his bandage covered muscles.

She tried to let him sleep on the Futon, but he refused every time she offered.

"And where are your kids going to sleep?" Eren asked.

"Well-" She tried to say.

"Do you really want them to sleep on a Futon with a strange man? We both know there's no room on the couch." He said.

"Well, you're not a strange man." Ai said.

"But do you want me sleeping in the same bed as your kids, or having them sleeping on the floor?" Eren asked.

"Well, no. Those are good points." She said.

So, Ai relented and let him sleep on the couch. She trusted Eren very much, but he is right, that would be weird, especially for her children. She also did not want her kids sleeping on the floor without a Futon. She was just trying to be nice and care for him.

However, she had to admit that Eren looked... cute, when he was sleeping. His normal bored and expressionless face was replaced with a relaxed and calm one. He looked so relaxed and at peace

when he was sleeping, and she couldn't help but think he looked adorable.

Aqua from his position, wondered if he should maybe get Ai's attention. She was staring at Eren for a little while, clearly finding his sleeping form cute. While it did help get them together, he wondered about Eren's injuries.

Those injuries are clearly from a fight. Ai asked about it on their way home from the academy. She confirmed that there was a workplace accident that resulted in a bunch of boxes falling on Eren. However, his injuries looked more consistent with fight related injuries.

Aqua couldn't tell exactly. He was a Gynecologist, so he was more familiar with female anatomy. He did recognize some injuries, mainly when a patient was assaulted and received injuries from that. However, this didn't look consistent with work related injuries.

That did make him think, Kuro's theory about him being reborn. It would match the weird things about him, such as his lack of understanding of technology. So far, the oldest invention Eren seemed unfamiliar with was a TV, which could mean he was born long before television. That would put him pre-World War Two.

There's no way, even if he was reborn, he'd have grown up in the modern era.

Was it possible he was brought to the future as an adult? If Ruby's rules for reincarnation was different, then who knows what Eren's rules were.

Assuming any of this was even accurate.

However, Aqua needed to move things along.

"Ai, can we please have breakfast?" He asked.

"Huh?" She broke out of her trance. "Oh right, mama will get right on that." She smiled.

"What's for breakfast mama?" Ruby asked as she walked into the main room.

We're going to have grilled chicken with rice and miso." Ai smiled.

"Awesome, I can't wait." She said happily.

"Just keep it down so Eren-San can sleep." She said.

"Ok." Ruby gave her a thumbs up.

Ai started getting the dishes and ingredients ready for the food, as well as heating the stove. She wanted to make it especially good today since Eren would be joining them for breakfast. This'll be his first home made meal by Ai. She couldn't wait for him to try it.

Suddenly, her phone vibrated and she opened it. She received a text from Meimei.

Mei: Found this really cute outfit, you should wear it while Eren is recovering.

Ai: Are you crazy!?

Mei: It's cute :(

Ai: A fetish nurse outfit?

Mei: It's perfect for a bit of roleplay. You could totally seduce him with it.

Ai: The skirt is so short it'd show my but and panties.

Mei: That's the idea.

Ai: You do realize that I have children, I can't prance around in that.

Mei: I can watch them for a day or two, or Miyako-San.

Ai: Absolutely not! I'd die of embarrassment.

Mei: How do you plan to get him if you won't even try to do a little sex appeal?

Ai: No!

Mei: But look at the cute thigh high stockings. You don't have heels, but it'll look so cute.

Ai: Goodbye!

Mei: You should start taking advice more from a married woman you know.

Ai put her phone down and ignored it. To be sure that Meimei wouldn't text her, she muted her number for the next hour. She did not need help with Eren, she would just find a way to do it without embarrassing stuff.

Why was it embarrassing? She already had sex before... well, once. Which resulted in a pregnancy, so she had very bad luck when it came to sex.

She glanced at her children, who were watching one of her old concerts on TV as a rerun.

Well, not bad luck.

"Time for food." She smiled as she finished up. She took the dishes and moved them to the table. Eren was still asleep, so she needed to wake him up. She would rather he get some more rest, but he needs a good and healthy breakfast to recover faster.

She tipped toed over to Eren while Ruby and Aqua sat down to eat. Both of them went to their knees and kept a good posture,

something Ai taught them to make sure they had good table manners.

" *Eren, wake up.* " She said in a low and soft voice, going up to his sleeping form.

He didn't shift and must be exhausted.

" *Eren.* " She reached out to shake his shoulders. " *Wake u-* "

Eren's hand reached out violently and grabbed her throat. Ai's gasp was cut off as he squeezed her throat, causing pain and making her eyes begin to tear up from the surprise. Eren's eyes looked blank, as if he wasn't paying attention to what was going on and reacted entirely out of habit.

Suddenly, his grip loosened, and Ai fell back on the floor. She held her neck gently, still having trouble breathing from suddenly having her throat constricted.

Aqua and Ruby stood up, unsure of what just happened since it was so sudden and violent.

" *Good morning.* " Eren said as he yawned and stretched from the couch. " *Why are you on the floor Ai?* " He asked, noticing that she was sitting on the floor next to him.

"*Eto, I-I slipped.* " She laughed, not mentioning that he just attacked her.

" *Are you ok?* " Eren asked. " *You look scared.* " He noticed.

" *Oh no, I just fell so I got a little scared.* " She laughed, wiping the tears from her eyes.

"Mama, what happened?" Ruby asked.

"Did he hurt you?" Aqua asked.

"No no, I just slipped." She said in Japanese.

Luckily, Aqua and Ruby weren't paying attention so it seemed like they didn't see what happened. It was so quick that she didn't even have time to process what happened.

" *What's wrong with them?* " Eren asked.

" *Nothing.* " Ai waved off.

Did he really not remember? Was he aware of his actions at all? He seemed like he was not even awake when he grabbed her, which terrified her. He never once showed any threatening behavior towards her. He didn't seem like he was having a bad dream either.

" *I just wanted you to know that breakfast was ready.* " She said, pointing to the food.

" *Oh, thanks.* " Eren said as he got up.

Eren walked over and sat cross legged on the floor. Ai served him his share and sat down to eat. Luckily, she doubted that her neck would bruise from the sudden contact, so that was a relief.

She wondered what caused that reaction. She guessed it had to do with his history as a war veteran. She heard stories of American Soldiers reacting to sudden sounds or waking up with violence. Maybe it was the same for Russian Soldiers?

He mentioned he was in the Middle East, which means that Eren fought in the Syrian Civil War. It was possible that he was in combat and that caused him to react with violence when he was woken up.

It scared Ai, but she knew he didn't do it on purpose, and she didn't want to scare him with the thought that she was hurt by him.

Aqua came to much of the same conclusions. He didn't see what happened, but he knew that Eren reacted violently to being woken

up. He figured it was normal if he was experiencing combat related PTSD.

Ruby was a bit worried, not fully understanding what happened. Maybe Eren was surprised when he woke up and reacted. There were a couple of times she scared Aqua from behind and he'd accidentally hit her. So, it was probably normal.

" *Dida mama scared a yew?* " She tried in English.

" *Huh?* " Eren asked.

" *Mama scarda Eren-San?* " She tried again.

" *Scared?* " He asked.

" *You just jumped up when I woke you up.* " Ai tried to salvage. " *It took me by surprise.* " She said.

" *Oh, sorry.* " He laughed. " *I guess I was scared. Your mama is scary.* " He said back to Ruby.

" *Mama is rawr.* " Ruby tried, imitating a monster as she said that.

" *She is.* " Eren laughed.

"Ruby-Chan, don't say that!" Ai complained to her daughter in Japanese.

" *You're getting better at talking.* " Eren smiled. " *Better than me.* "

" *No understando.* " Ruby said since Eren spoke too fast for her.

" *You're English good.* " Eren said slowly.

" *Tanka yew.* " She smiled.

"My baby is so smart!" She yelled. "What about you Aqua-Chan?"

" *I cana speaks bettero.* " Aqua said, intentionally trying to make his accent sound really bad.

" *They're fast learners.* " Eren smiled.

" *That's something they didn't inherit from me.* " Ai laughed.

" *It takes dedication to dance the way you do.* " Eren said. " *I think they inherited your drive.* "

Ai blushed at the compliment and took a sip from her cup so as to hide it. After finishing it, she went back to eating while Ruby tried to talk with Eren.

She checked as her phone vibrated, an unknown number popped up.

?: Did you block me!?

Oh, it was Meimei, probably using her husband's phone.

Ai: I muted you for an hour.

?: You'll regret not following my advice!

Ai: Try anything and I'll put itching powder in your underwear before our next show.

?: Do that and I'll hide your underwear from your locker, good luck dancing in a skirt without panties!

Ai smiled at the exchange. Sometimes her and Meimei would get into little bantering matches. Obviously, neither of them would actually follow through with the threats, but they would banter like good friends occasionally.

She got another text however.

Hikaru: I'm heading to the MMA gym this evening, I was wondering if you and Eren want to come. I'll order dinner while you're there.

" Eren, Kamiki-San is wondering if you want to meet him this evening at the MMA gym. " She asked Eren. " If you're not feeling well enough, I can tell him some other time. " She said.

" I don't mind. " Eren said. " I've sparred before in worse shape. " He shrugged.

" I'll let him know, but you better do what I say when you're there. No overexerting yourself. " She said seriously.

" I wouldn't dare make you angry. " He laughed subtly. " I don't want to be like Aqua. "

Ai laughed at that. Eren seemed like he was feeling relaxed. He was smiling, although subtly, and making an effort to talk with her and the kids. It was a side of him that she doubted anyone really saw. Which means, she was the only one to see this side of him. It was nice, like only she knew this side of him.

Ai texted her ex and let him know that they would come.

Aqua overheard and knew that Hikaru wanted to test Eren's abilities. He'd intentionally have to go light on Eren since he was hurt, but it would still give him information on Eren's abilities.

Aqua couldn't do much to dissuade them, but as long as Eren was with them and they were in a public place, Aqua would tolerate it.

"I'll use the bath and get changed." Aqua said as he took his dishes to the sink.

"Hold up." Ai said as she opened her phone.

"What?" Aqua asked.

"I'm setting a timer, you have ten minutes. No more before I come to get you." She said.

"Seriously?" He asked. "I'm not going to sneak out of my own home."

"You lost privacy privileges when you told Miyako-San you wanted to use the restroom, only to run away. Be thankful I'm giving you a timer." She said with a small glare.

Can she just let that go!?

" *Wow, what happened to you?* " Hikaru asked as Eren, Ai, and the kids walked into the gym.

Hikaru was dressed in a short sleeved black shirt with a pair of athletic shorts. Eren was dressed similarly, but he had a sleeveless shirt, showing off his bruised arms. Ai and Ruby were dressed in athletic clothes, with Ruby wearing sweat pants, a skirt, and a short sleeved shirt. Ai wore yoga pants and a short sleeved V-neck shirt. Aqua wore sweat pants and a short sleeve as well.

The gym was well put together, with a ring in the center and weight lifting stuff on the edges, as well as bags and treadmills. There were posters of famous Japanese and International MMA fighters in the UFC.

" *Work accident.* " Eren shrugged.

" *Well, it'll be fun to do a bit of sparring.* " Hikaru smiled.

" *Just remember, you need to go light on Eren.* " Ai said to Hikaru. " *He's still recovering, and a bit of exercise will help him recover. But I'll be watching to make sure he stays healthy.* "

" *No worries.* " Hikaru waved off. " *I'll go only 40% strength, as long as Eren agrees as well.* " He laughed.

" *Sure.* " Eren shrugged. " *So how does this go?* " Eren asked.

" *First, we need to warm up.* " Hikaru said.

Hikaru showed Eren how to properly warm up for a spar. Ai and the kids followed as well, imitating his moves as he worked. Eren was in a bit of pain as he moved, but he felt well enough to workout. Ai would occasionally mention it, but Eren would wave it off.

Although he felt weak and sore at first, Eren started to feel better as he moved. Eren knew from his time with the Scouts, that the worst thing you can do when you're hurt is do nothing at all. As long as the damage was minimal, you needed to move around and continue working out to help speed up recovery.

Not that he really ever had to slowly recover since he was a shifter at the time.

" *Ok, now we get some gloves and protective gear to do a bit of sparring.* " He handed Eren some protective gear.

The gloves and helmet felt like it was made out of a weird kind of leather. He wasn't familiar with the material, but he wondered if it was some kind of animal leather. There was a strap with no buckle, but Hikaru showed him out to attach it. A soft and fuzzy material would stick to a hard and scratchy one. Just an example of how much more advanced this society was.

" *Ai-Chan, can you please keep score on the whiteboard?* " Hikaru asked.

" *Sure Kamiki-San.* " She said, taking a dry erase marker and writing Eren and Hikaru's names on the board.

" *Just remember Eren, I'll go easy on you so just go as hard as you feel comfortable.* " He said.

" *Sure.* " Eren said as he got into a fighting stance.

" *Tap, Tap!* " Hikaru yelled as Eren got him in another arm bar.

Eren let him go and stood up, reaching out his hand to help Hikaru up from the ground. Hikaru took his hand, but was exhausted and covered in sweat.

" *I said go at 40% strength.* " He panted.

" *I am.* " Eren shrugged.

" *Oh... holy shit.* " He said in disbelief.

" *If you want to go harder, you can.* " Eren said.

" *I've been going max strength the whole time!* " Hikaru yelled.

" *Sorry.* " Eren shrugged.

" *That's another one to Eren!* " Ai said excitedly as she marked another tally for Eren.

So far, they did eight rounds and Ai made sure to keep track of who won. After adding the most recent tally mark, Eren won his eighth round.

" *Not a single victory...* " Hikaru said sadly.

Aqua smiled. Take that you bastard. Even completely exhausted and injured, Eren completely destroyed him.

" *You're still pretty good Hikaru.* " Eren said.

" *Honestly, your form isn't very good.* " He said.

" *What do you mean?* " Eren asked.

" *It's missing a lot of technical aspects, and anytime I got in a dominant position, you'd just brute force your way out of it.* " He said.

" I have to beat on technique, but you just have much more experience, I think. "

" I mostly taught myself. " Eren said. *" A friend showed me the basics, but I learned mostly by myself. "*

" You used it in combat, right? " Hikaru asked.

" A few times. " If you count being a Titan.

" That explains it, no matter how technically skilled I am, I can't match your experience. " He laughed. *" I'm impressed. "* He patted Eren on the back.

" You're still pretty good. " Eren smiled a bit. *" It honestly was fun to practice again. "*

" I'm glad you had fun. " Hikaru said.

" I want to fight Eren-San! " Ruby ran into the ring.

" Ruby-Chan! " Ai called out.

" Oh, let her fight Eren. " Hikaru said. *" I'm sure she can beat him where I couldn't. "*

" Sure. " Eren shrugged with a small smile. *" Try to beat me if you can. "* He laughed.

Ai made a new score chart with Eren and Ruby. Aqua stood off from the side, keeping his eye on Hikaru the whole time.

He seemed like he was trying to make a friendship with Eren. Hikaru knew that he would not be able to deal with Eren in a confrontation. Eren, even when injured, easily beat him in a low intensity spar. He wondered what would happen if Eren fought him for real.

Then again, he saw what happens if Eren gets serious. Ryosuke had a firsthand account of that before he died. However, it seemed like

his new plan was to make Eren his friend and earn his trust. Right now, Aqua wouldn't be able to stop him since he had no way of convincing Eren that he was a danger.

He could gamble and hope Eren was supernatural as well, but that was a huge gamble. If he was wrong, Eren would never believe him again and think that he's just playing pretend or think he has mental issues. He'd need a way to make Eren distrustful of Hikaru.

Ai smiled as she saw Eren and Ruby play fight. Eren would lift her high into the air and gently slam her into the ground, making her laugh at the sudden height. However, he also let Ruby get him in poorly executed holds and grapples that she struggled to do because of the height difference.

Eren let her win most rounds, but occasionally won himself just to inspire her to try harder.

She smiled at it. It was nice to see Eren playing with a child and acting normal. He even smiled and laughed, though subtly, as he did. She could tell he enjoyed himself and loved playing with Ruby.

It's a shame that Hikaru kept his distance and that her children were so distrustful of him. She didn't want to deprive Hikaru of the chance to have a relationship with his children, but they both made the decision to stay separated initially. Hopefully, her kids would one day have a good relationship with him.

"I have to use the restroom." Aqua said as he walked away.

"Hold up." Ai said.

"What?" He asked.

He gasped a bit as Ai easily lifted him up into her arms and started walking towards the restroom.

"What are you doing?" He asked.

"I told you; you lost privacy privileges Aqua." She said.

"Ai, you're going to the women's restroom!" He said in embarrassment.

"Don't worry Aqua-Chan, you're four. No one will care." She giggled.
"And you'll be going into the women's room with me until you're legally no longer allowed to. Even then, I might come into the men's restroom to make sure you don't run away again." She joked.

At least, he hoped she was joking.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to!" He tried to yell.

"Too bad~" She laughed.

Thankfully, she let him use the stall by himself. He was worried though, if he ran away again, he'd lose even more privacy.

If he was a kid, this wouldn't be all that embarrassing. It's actually normal for kids his age to be escorted to the women's restroom by their mother. However, it was just weird to have a woman half his age making sure he went to the restroom and didn't run away again.

It's not like he actually ran away. He just needed answers and information to keep Ai alive. He wanted to make sure she was protected and needed to go to the academy in order to learn more about her protector. He did it to protect her.

Not that he could tell her that. However, because he had no lie prepared, it cost him a chance to be autonomous in the future. She would ask him where he's going if he so much as went into a different room.

He really screwed up.

After eating some food that Hikaru ordered, Ai, Eren, and the kids were preparing to leave the gym. Overall, it was a fun time for everyone involved, especially Ruby who was the only one to actually beat Eren.

She had volunteered Ai to spar with Eren, who quickly tried to say no. Hikaru only laughed and encouraged her daughter, which basically forced her to spar.

It was a predictable outcome. Eren won, easily. He didn't want to go easy on Ai since Ruby was cheering him on, so he decided to gently beat Ai, who was laughing the whole time.

" So, that's a record of eighteen to Eren and twelve to Ruby-Chan. " Ai laughed, tallying up Eren's total winnings.

" You are one hell of a fighter Eren. " Hikaru laughed. *" I guess I'd need to do this professionally instead of a hobby if I ever hope to beat you. "*

" What do you do exactly? " Eren asked.

" I'm just a washed up actor who's trying to get into producing. " He said.

" I think you were good back then Kamiki-San. " Ai encouraged.

" Nah, I was always average at best. Which for acting, doesn't make much money. " He laughed.

" Same with being an idol. " Ai said.

" So, producing makes more money? " Eren asked.

" Yea, a lot more if you do it right. " He said with a shrug. *" Hopefully one day I'll actually be a bit more famous, if only behind the scenes. "*

" I think you can do it Hikaru-San. " She smiled.

" *Actually, I was wondering if I could ask a request.* " He said.

" *What's that?* " Ai asked.

" *Could I maybe take Ruby-Chan on a little father/daughter play date? Nothing insane, just a little hiking adventure.* " He requested.

" *That's up to Rub-* " Ai was cut off as Aqua rushed between the adults and Ruby.

"What's wrong?" Ruby asked, not fully understanding what everyone was saying, only that she heard her name.

"I'm not letting him near Ruby!" Aqua argued, avoiding speaking English.

"Wait, why?" Ruby asked.

"I just don't want you to." Aqua argued.

"Aqua-Chan, that's not a decision that's up to you." Ai said sincerely. "It's Ruby's choice."

"And I really don't want to." Ruby said. "I want to spend more time with mama."

"What about your papa Ruby-Chan?" Ai asked, trying to encourage some father/daughter bonding time. "Don't you want to get to know him?"

"He's ok, but he's not you mama." She said innocently. "I hate being away from you."

"You heard her, she's not going." Aqua said.

Normally, Aqua was calm and collected. He could easily use his childish fears to manipulate anyone in this group. Only Ruby would know his real reason for being more mature. He could very easily manipulate them.

However, this was different. Aqua was terrified of Ruby being alone with Hikaru. How easy would it be for him to let an accident happen and cause Ai grief in order to isolate her. He had no doubt that Hikaru would kill Ruby if it meant getting to Ai.

Even though he could manipulate them, the fear he was experiencing was real. He still had no tangible plan to keep Hikaru at bay, at least nothing that would make sense to a bunch of adults. The reaction and fear he was experiencing was real, and it was causing his mask to break.

"Why do you hate me so much son?" Hikaru asked in a sad voice.

"You abandoned Ai and hurt her." He accused, using some kind of excuse to justify his actions. "Like we would ever want you in our lives." He said.

"I see." He said, narrowing his eyes slightly at Aqua.

It was subtle, too subtle for anyone that didn't know his true nature to catch, but Aqua caught it. He just made himself a target to Hikaru, on the same level as Eren. He's an obstacle that's ruining his plan, much the same way Eren was when he stopped Ryosuke. Much like Goro was on the first attempt.

"Kamiki-San, please understand him." Ai said as she grabbed his shoulder. "He's still very sensitive after what happened with the attack."

Hikaru's narrowed eyes soften as he looked at Ai. He smiled lovingly at her and patted her on the back.

"Oh, don't worry about it Ai-Chan. One day I'll get him to like me." He laughed. "I think he's just being overly protective of his sister, it's normal for a young boy without a father."

"True, but please understand how sensitive he is right now." She said.

"Of course, I will." He smiled.

"Thank you." Ai breathed a sigh of relief.

"One day I'll have some good moments with him. When he learns to trust me, I should take him on the hike instead. It would probably be better than Ruby-Chan since he's a boy." He said.

"You can have fun." Ruby said to Aqua.

"Not a chance." He said, knowing that he was just added to Hikaru's target list.

Ruby may have been a means to an end. If he had to guess, Ruby would be used as a sacrificial pawn to cause extreme grief to Ai. She'd isolate herself from him and Eren, and probably try to seek any form of comfort. Comfort that Hikaru would provide, isolated from the people who would protect her.

At least, that's his theory. It explains what he's trying to do.

Hikaru learned two things today. He'd never beat Eren in a confrontation, even if Eren was already injured. He also learned that Aqua is a barrier that is preventing him from isolating Ai from Eren.

So that begs the question, what next? What's his plan now that he can't fight Eren or isolate Ai?

" *Anyway, this was fun. Hope to have a rematch one day Eren.* " He said, patting Eren on the back.

" *Sure, I wouldn't mind.* " Eren smiled. " *Maybe next time I'll go 20% strength.* "

" *You'll probably still beat me.* " He laughed. " *Anyway, you all take care and have a good night.* "

He went back to the locker rooms.

"You should give him a chance Aqua-Chan." Ai said.

"Why?" Aqua asked. "We have Eren, don't we?"

Time to try and put the idea in her head.

"Eren is not your father." She tried to say.

"He can be." Aqua countered.

Ai blushed at the thought. Eren would be a good father, she had no doubt. After seeing how he played with Ruby today, she knew that he would be a very good father to her children, if she could ever get over her shyness.

But it's not right to deprive Kamiki from his children. He deserves to see them grow up and become amazing adults, just like she did.

" *What's he saying?* " Eren asked.

" *N-nothing.* " Ai quickly said. " *Just he thought you fought well.* "

Liar, Aqua thought. He really needs to pretend to learn English better so he can actually communicate with Eren.

" *Thanks.* " Eren smiled at Aqua.

Aqua gave him a thumbs up anyway.

Aqua wondered if he was as shy as she was. Eren was clearly changing for the better. He smiled more and even bantered a bit more. Leagues different than how he used to be. He'd need to get these two together until he found a way to deal with Hikaru.

Eren took out his phone, which was vibrating. His eyes narrowed at the number.

" *You go on ahead without me, I need to take this. It's work.* " He said.

" *Sure, we'll head into the convenience store to get some drinks.* " Ai said, taking her children's hands. " *Meet us there.* " She said.

Eren hit accept and answered the phone.

" *What?* " He asked.

" *I was impressed with your little suicide mission.* " Oyabun Yoshida said.

" *I know.* " Eren said.

" *Very confident.* " He laughed. " *I have a little promotion ready for you, I'd like you to come to the next meeting.* " He said.

" *Where?* " Eren asked.

" *I have it on good authority that you know a Hoshino Ai, from B-Komachi.* " He said.

" *Did your lackies following me tell you?* " Eren asked.

" *You noticed that, did you?* " He asked. " *I'm impressed.* "

Eren honestly probably wouldn't have noticed much. Now that he was looking for them, he'd see people talking on phones and reporting his location. They were much better than that crazy stalker. If Sergei didn't tell him though, he may have missed it.

" *Where.* " Eren said again.

" *It'll be in a private VIP booth at the next B-Komachi concert on Saturday.* " He said.

" *A teenage idol performance?* " Eren asked skeptically.

" *What better place?* " Yoshida said. " *Thousands of people and no way to monitor us. It's common for criminals to meet and do business in populated events.* " He said.

Sergei did say that, since he did one of his jobs at Ai's last concert.

" I want to make something clear Yoshida. " Eren said.

" Go ahead. " He said.

" If anything happens to Ai or her children, then what happened at that safehouse will pale in comparison to what I'll do to you. " He threatened.

" I figured. " Yoshida said.

" People here call me, what, the child of the devil? " Eren asked.

" Akuma No Ko. " He said.

" It's not the first time I've been called a devil. " Eren said. *" Anything happens to her, I will show you why I was called the Devil of Paradis. "*

" Very good. " He chuckled. *" But you have no need to worry, we'll protect her while you're away. I can promise you that. "*

" I'm not stupid Yoshida. " Eren said. *" Don't you dare use her to manipulate me. "*

" I won't, now make sure you prepare for the meeting. No guns allowed, though I know you'll ignore that. " Yup.

" You couldn't stop me from bringing one anyway. " Eren said.

" That's true, nor would I want to get on your bad side. " He said.

Eren knew he was placating him, saying what he wants to hear since Eren proved how much of an asset he was now. It would work for now, but he had no doubt that Yoshida will use Ai against him in some way in the future.

" Bring your best suit for the promotion. " He said. " We'll also discuss how we're going to strike the Nakano-Kai. "

And that's it for this chapter.

Did anyone think Hikaru would actually be a threat to Eren? lol.
Physically, no, but Hikaru needs to find alternate ways.

Anyway, hope you all enjoyed.

Discussing War Plans

Chapter 24: Discussing War Plans

" *Ok, hope you all are ready for the big concert.* " Ai said as she put on her disguise.

Eren was with her, dressed in a pair of black slacks and a simple white button up shirt. He knew he had to look decent with the meeting with the Oyabun, but this was the best he had.

"Another awesome concert!" Ruby said in excitement. " *Ar yew essited Eren-San?* " She asked Eren.

" *Not the singing, but I am excited for the dancing.* " He said.

"Ecchi." Ruby narrowed her eyes.

"Ruby-Chan!" Ai laughed loudly. "Where did you learn that word?" She asked.

Ai should probably reprimand Ruby for saying something dirty like that, but to hear a child say something like that was hilarious and Ai could barely compose herself.

" *What did she say?* " Eren asked.

" *She said that's great!* " Ai tried to cover.

Eren knew that wasn't what she said. Not to illicit that kind of reaction from the young mother. However, Eren found it to be really cute and adorable. He wondered when the last time he saw such happy moments like this were.

The last time he felt this at peace was maybe, maybe right before the walls fell. Ai's screaming and excessive punishment of Aqua

reminded him of his own mother. How his own mother would almost become a devil herself when he really messed up.

" *What are you thinking.* " Ai asked.

" *I just-* " Eren thought on how he should phrase it. " *Never mind.* " He said.

"Ehhhh~" Ai drew out, moving closer to Eren.

He was clearly thinking about something, but he didn't want to say it. She knew that whatever he was thinking about, it was something nice. Something that put a smile on his face. She was glad he felt relaxed.

Eren had a glow to him that was different lately. Like, he was completely different. He smiled more, laughed, and even was playful. She blushed when she thought about his smile. It was so gentle and warm, nothing like the confident and suave smile that Hikaru had.

Hikaru always had a feeling that he was constantly trying to manipulate people. When she was young, that confident smile would make her almost melt. He had such a confidence about him that it was impossible not to be attracted to him.

Eren's smile though was soft and genuine. His smiles were rare, but when he did smile, you could tell he was legitimately at peace. It was a different kind of attractive, but attractive all the same.

Now if only he could get a haircut. He needed to style his hair more. The bun was nice though. Like he was too busy to care about it, which also was attractive.

Ok, stop thinking about how attractive he is, Ai thought as she blushed.

" *Mako will be here soon.* " Eren said.

" *Miyako.* " She giggled.

" *Miyeko*. " He tried again.

" *ME*. " Ai said.

" *Me*. " Eren repeated.

" *YA*. " Ai said.

" *Ya*. " Eren repeated again.

" *KO, ME-YA-KO*. "

" *Meeyako*. " Eren repeated.

" *Close*. " Ai giggled.

" *Eren-San canty Talku*. " Ruby giggled.

" *Funny*. " He glared at her, which made Ruby giggle.

Ai walked outside where Miyako was waiting with her car. She loaded up her bag which had a few things she'd need for the day and got into the car.

" *Good to see you Meiyako*. " Eren said.

" *Closer*. " She said. " *Are you actually going to enjoy the concert this time?* " Miyako asked as she started driving.

" *I didn't hate it last time*. " Eren said.

" *You did say you didn't like it*. " Ai said sadly.

" *I just don't have great experiences with those kinds of performances*. " He said.

" *Really, why?* " Miyako asked.

" *I went to a play a while ago*. " He explained.

" *What was it about?* " Ai asked.

" *Just a big monster thing, nothing important.* " Not important here. "
Anyway, there was an attack, and everything went chaotic. "

" *Was it Russians?* " Miyako asked, remembering that he was Crimean.

Russians? No. It was actually Willy Tybur who initiated it by declaring war on Paradis. Eren just retaliated.

" Yes. " Eren lied.

" *I heard prior to and even after the invasion that a lot of pro-Russian and pro-Ukrainian citizens and Soldiers would attack each other.* " Miyako commented.

" *Sound about right.* " Eren said.

It hurt to lie to them, but he had no choice. They would never believe his situation. Even if they did, they would hate and despise him for what he did. A devil like him didn't deserve peace after what he did.

" Ow. " Eren said as he felt a flick on his ear.

He turned to see Ai's outstretched hand, which was the flick he felt.

" *Don't be so sad Eren.* " She smiled at him. "*We're going to a fun concert. Nothing bad will happen and there will be no danger. So, you can forget about it and enjoy the moment. It's not a good thing to think too much about what happened.* "

" *Did you have to flick my ear?* " He asked.

" *Yup.* " Ai laughed. "*You were thinking too much about the past, even if you're not being completely honest.* " She said.

" *Of course I am.* " Eren asked nervously.

"You're not a good liar Eren." She laughed.

Ai didn't want to let him know that she knew when he was and was not being entirely honest. Everyone has their secrets, and a deadly attack at a play was typically something that most people didn't want to be honest about. It was totally normal and fine to be a little dishonest about traumatic events.

Which is why Ai never blamed Eren for a bit of lying. After all, she'd be a complete hypocrite if she gave him grief for lying when she built her whole career and personality on a lie.

" I also really am not a fan of the music. " Eren said.

" Well, if that's the case, I'll make you a fan. " Ai winked as she made a peace sign, making sure Eren could see her through the mirror.

" Really? " Eren asked.

" Yea. " Ai smiled. *" I won't ever perform at the Tokyo Dome until I know you'll be my biggest fan in the crowd. "*

" Sure. " Eren shrugged. *" Though I have to admit, Meme seems much better at dancing than- ow. "* Eren said as he was flicked in the ear again.

" I am not amused Eren. " Ai glared at him.

" I am. " He smiled.

Ai giggled as well, glad he was able to relax and have fun.

Miyako just rolled her eyes.

"Hey Ai-San, the President wants to see you." Meimei said as Ai finished getting to her idol outfit. "Where's Eren?" She looked around.

"I recommended that the best place to watch this show was from the crowd." Ai said. "It'll be different than a VIP booth that we'd provide."

"Either way, you need to hurry up to see the President."

"Sure, I'll be right there." She said. "Aqua-Chan, you're coming with." She said.

"Fine." He sighed in a defeated tone.

"He said only you." Meimei said.

"Aqua will wait outside his office, I'm not taking my eyes off of him." She said.

"Ok." Meimei giggled, amused at how Aqua was being punished.

"Help." He tried to say to Meimei as he was dragged away by Ai.

"Nope." Meimei waved at the poor child as he was pulled away.

Ai deposited Aqua in the waiting lounge right outside of President Saitou's temporary office for this venue. There was a single door that led into his office and she noticed that it was barely decorated since he was only here for a few days to prepare for the concert.

"Nice office." Ai commented.

"Ai, there's something I need to talk about." He said.

Ai shut the door but didn't realize it was cracked open, letting Aqua get to the door and listen in on the conversation. He was curious on what was going on.

"What is it about?" She asked.

"It's about Eren." He said.

"What about Eren?" She asked.

"Please sit down." He said.

Ai raised her eyebrow but did as he said. She carefully moved her skirt under her as she sat down, trying not to cause any damage to her skirt or get it dirty.

"What's going on?" She asked.

"I don't think Eren has been entirely honest on why he's here." Saitou said.

"Oh?" Ai asked.

"Yea, I don't think he's in Japan entirely legally." Saitou said.

"What makes you say that?" She asked.

"I got a look at his passport and copied his passport number." Saitou said.

"Why did you do that?" She asked, getting a bit annoyed.

"Because I have a bad feeling about him." Saitou said.

"So, you got his number, then what?" She asked.

"I ran a criminal background check through my employee recruiting system to see if he had any history of criminal activity." He explained.

"And what did you find?" Ai asked. "Did he shop lift, or maybe he got into a drunken fight. Please let me know what you found."

"Ai, I don't appreciate the tone." He said.

"I don't appreciate you violating someone's privacy." She said angrily.

"Ai-" He tried to say.

"What did you find?" She asked.

"Nothing." He said.

"Nothing?" Ai asked.

"No history at all. His passport number does not exist in the Japanese database." He said.

"What does that mean?" She asked.

"It means there's a good chance that he's in Japan illegally." He said. "I expected to have no records from Ukraine, they're not exactly the best in record keeping, especially Crimea. But Eren should have a history in Japan and he doesn't."

"Did you put the number correctly?" Ai asked.

"Y-yes." He stuttered.

"President, did you put the number in correctly?" She asked.

"I'm sure I did." Saitou said.

"How did you get the number?" She asked.

"While we were at the beach, I glanced through-" He was cut off.

"Glanced?" Ai asked. "So, you can't say for certain that you copied it exactly." Ai accused.

"I'm sure I did-"

"And what if you didn't?" Ai asked. "What if you made a mistake and now you're about to confront Eren and make accusations that you're not sure about."

"Ai, calm dow-" He tried to say.

"I wont calm down!" Ai stood up as she raised her voice.

"Ai, I'm trying to make sure-"

"What, make sure I'm protected!?" She yelled. "You decide to completely violate someone's privacy and cast suspicion on them despite what he's done for us!?"

"I appreciate what he's done Ai, but if Eren is a criminal-"

"He's not a criminal!" Ai yelled. "He's a veteran and a victim of a war he wanted nothing to do with! And I refuse to go to him and cast doubt on him if you can't even tell me that you're sure the number was copied correctly!"

"That can be dangerous Ai." Saitou tried to reason. "We don't know-"

"You've never talked with him!" Ai countered. "You've never asked him what he likes, or what his past was like. You never got to know him or tried to see who he really is. All you do is cast doubt on the man who saved your company and saved my life!"

"I have talked with him." Ai continued. "I've seen how he treats other people, and how protective he is of the people around him. How he'll let a little girl style his hair or let her win in a play fight against him. Or how sad he gets when people see the violent side he showed when he protected me!"

"What if I am right?" Saitou asked.

"You're not!" Ai denied. "He's a good and kind person and doesn't deserve any of this treatment."

"Even then, I can't approve him being around you." He said.

"I'm not a child and you're not my father!" Ai said. "You are my boss!"

Saitou looked hurt when she said that. He knew she was right, and Ai felt bad about saying that, but it was a fact

"If you try to kick Eren out, I will quit." Ai gave her ultimatum.

"Ai-" Saitou said.

"I can't let you treat Eren so poorly, despite everything he's done." She said. "So, if you keep violating his privacy or treating him with suspicion, I will quit."

"Ok." He relented.

She was right. He let his paranoia and worry violate Eren's privacy. He was no doubting if he even took it down correctly. He did rush to avoid getting seen, maybe he did make a mistake. Maybe he took the number down wrong, and the report came back empty because the number was wrong.

"I'm sorry." He said honestly. "I'll drop it, Ai."

Ai wiped her face, trying hard not to cry and ruin her makeup. She never yelled at him like that or threatened to quit B-Komachi before. She felt like a dumb teenager that was arguing with her dad about a boy, which was kind of true.

Ai stood up and walked out the door, needing to get back to the makeup room and have the stylists touch it up.

Aqua listened in and stepped back from the door as Ai grabbed his hand. He heard every word, and doubted that Saitou got the number wrong. Was Eren really in Japan illegally? It's not too crazy, especially as a war victim. Why Japan if he wanted to run, there are closer countries to illegally enter. Japan would be out of his way.

The supernatural possibility would kind of explain it, for no other reason than simply saying "Magic" can literally explain anything weird.

He would need to watch out for Eren though, he was starting to look as dangerous as Hikaru.

"This way." A yakuza member motioned for Eren to enter into the VIP room.

The inside had a warm red glow to it, as well as red seats and a decorated wall that had pattern wallpaper. It looked nice enough but was ruined with the smell of cigarette smoke. Nearly everyone inside was smoking.

There were multiple members of Yoshida's gang, the Inagawa-Kai gang. They all were older men, with nice suits and tattoos that were showing from underneath them. Each man was either smoking or drinking an expensive looking glass of liquor.

One man that caught his eye was Raido, so the man was a bit more important than he initially thought.

They were sitting at a dinner table, with a large window on the wall that showed the stage. Thousands of people were in the stands, waiting for Ai to come out and waving those weird glow sticks.

"This is the boy." Oyabun Yoshida said as Eren walked in. "Please, everyone switch to English for his benefit." He said.

Yoshida ensured everything was good for Eren, and Eren knew it was to keep him friendly since Eren proved himself to be a useful pawn in this little war.

"Do you smoke kid?" One member asked.

"No." Eren said.

"Kid's afraid of cancer." One man chuckled.

"Eren, these are my, what's the English equivalent, Commanders? Captains? Who knows." Yoshida said as he took a puff of his cigarette. "Take a seat." He said.

Eren did as he was asked, taking a seat at the table right next to Yoshida.

"So, this is the kid that took out the safehouse alone?" One man asked.

"Yea, the reverse grip RPG? What the hell even was that?" Another man laughed.

"Apparently it worked well enough." Another said. "I'll give the kid style points."

"Eren here has talent, survived the initial ambush with only a dislocated shoulder." Raido commented.

"And dating an idol, how cute." Another one laughed.

Eren had his pistol on the back of his waistbelt, prepared to kill someone if they so much as made a threat towards Ai.

"Who knew innocent little Ai had children, could you imagine the scandal."

"That's enough, we're ready to talk." Yoshida interrupted.

"Go ahead Oyabun." Raido said.

"First, I do believe we should give Eren-San a much-deserved promotion. He took out a heavily guarded Nakano-Kai safehouse alone with no help, outside of an arms dealer of course." He said. "So, a promotion to a, what's the English equivalent, Lieutenant, is it?" He asked. "We'll make you an official Lieutenant of one of our direct action groups."

"Direct action?" Eren asked.

"They're our groups that's responsible for carrying out more... kinetic jobs." Raido said. "Basically, if we need someone killed or something dealt with personally, a direct action group is called on."

"They're more organized than the free lancers we normally send, like you. As well as more trained and skilled." Yoshida said. "It'll be a

good promotion and lets you take more of the cut for any jobs. Especially over lower ranking members."

Eren thought about this, truthfully, he really didn't want to get any higher in the ranks than he had to. But he was now effectively stuck, especially with Yoshida maintaining a watchful gaze on Ai.

Things have spiraled out of control, and Eren wasn't interested in continuing this. He doesn't know why he did that safehouse job, he just wanted to show this prick not to mess with him. It worked, but now he was functionally trapped.

"This isn't permanent Yoshida." Eren said.

"He's the Oyabun you brat!" One member yelled at Eren.

"Enough!" Yoshida held his hand up. "Give the boy some slack, youth often cause one to disrespect elders. He will learn."

That was a lie, he only wanted to keep Eren happy, so he'll feel more compelled to work for him. If Eren didn't show his skill, Yoshida would have tried to punish him.

"I have no interest in a promotion or whatever." Eren crossed his arms. "I don't intend to involve myself more than what I've been doing, so I'll decline the offer."

Although Captain Levi understood criminal undergrounds better than Eren, Eren still knew that declining an offer from organized crime was risky. Most gangs had policies where you're in for life, and the only way out was death. Hopefully, Yoshida would see reason and let Eren stay a freelancer.

Eren would hate to have to kill them all.

"How about you take time to think about it." Yoshida said. "It's a big decision, no doubt you'll need to consider your options."

Based on the looks from the other Commanders, this was unusual behavior from Yoshida. He's probably thinking of a way to manipulate Eren. No doubt he wants Eren to join of his own free will instead of being compelled, but he also knew how strong Eren was now, so he wanted to keep Eren happy.

"I'm sure you didn't get this little get together here just for a promotion." Eren said.

"Of course not." Yoshida laughed as he patted Eren on the back, acting overly friendly compared to how he used to be. "We're discussing plans to start this little war with the Nakano-Kai."

"We'll need your help to pull this off kid." Raido said.

"What's the plan?" Eren asked.

"Raido will explain." Yoshida said.

Raido pulled out a map of Tokyo, it had various drawings and graphics on it, showing what exactly he came up with. A lot of it was focused on one specific street, though Eren couldn't read it.

"We have a rat in the Nakano-Kai feeding us information, he pointed out a lot of businesses and safehouses along the Ginza Strip that they're using." He said. "The plan is to launch a full on attack in Ginza to break them. Nakano-Kai only recently moved into Tokyo, so this is the only foothold they have right now."

"Why move into there?" One boss asked. "It would be hard to keep a low presence."

"Exactly why they moved in." Yoshida said. "They never intended to stay; this is a staging area for their attacks. They fully plan to commit to drawing a gang war into the open, so they're using the crowds and difficulty of the area to stage."

"But Oyabun, with respect." One man said. "If we attempt to overtly attack Nakano-Kai in the Ginza Strip, we'll be surrounded by Police."

"The police will be occupied." Yoshida smiled. "By a turn of fate, a very valuable little decoy has made its way into my possession, a decoy that the entirety of Japan will devote resources to finding."

"The Shinomiya conglomerate has massive sway over the police and government." Raido said, causing Eren to raise his eyebrow. That word sounded familiar. "Shinomiya Gan'an has lost something dear to him. Something we have."

"We've heard about that." One Commander said. "What makes you think he won't bring the entirety of the law on us?"

"Simple." Yoshida smiled. "He doesn't know we have it yet, meaning we can easily place the blame on someone else. Not only that, but all we have to do is leak a little bit of information about where it is, and the entirety of the Metropolitan law enforcement will swarm to that area."

"So, we make them move far away from Ginza, leaving it open and ready for the attack." Raido smiled. "Then, when the dust clears, we blame the Nakano-Kai. Considering what was taken, Gan'an will ensure rigged trials in order to punish every single member."

They were being vague, Eren was able to pick up on it. What did they say? Sinoma or something? Where did he hear that before? It sounded familiar, but he couldn't place the name.

"We'll effectively wipe out every single member, with everything through murder to a rigged trial." Yoshida said.

"It's effective, if not risky." One Commander said.

"We'll need to take the risk unfortunately." Raido said. "The Nakano-Kai are fully willing to take this fight into the open, any attempts at

communicating with them have failed. We've sent a few messengers, but they've only had their heads returned."

"We have to do a single night of bloodshed and then lay low after words." Yoshida said. "Once the trials are finished and investigations conclude, we'll go back to business as usual."

"Eren, you'll take the hardest job." Raido said. "There'll be a meeting at a restaurant in Ginza, the higher leadership of the Nakano-Kai will be there. They've strong armed the restaurant owner into letting them use it as a meeting spot. We know when their weekly meetings are and will plan the attack for that night."

"So, you want everyone dead?" Eren asked.

"Yes." Raido said. "Once the upper leadership are dead, the rest will get taken out over time. Especially when we destroy their safehouses and storage areas along Ginza."

"We have other direct action groups attacking multiple stores and storage areas." Yoshida said. "They'll be ordered when the assault will be, and we'll attack every location simultaneously. Nakano-Kai is a small gang, they have no hope once they're overwhelmed. Especially since their main area is in Osaka."

"After that, we return the little insurance policy to the Shinomiya patriarch and go about our business. It'll be planted that the Nakano-Kai were the one's who took it." Raido said.

Eren thought to the little game he played this morning with Ai.

No

Me

A

Shinomea. He had to ask Ai where he heard that from, it sounds so familiar. Maybe it was some kind of political body that he's heard in passing.

"There is one very important thing we need to clarify before we begin the attack." Yoshida said.

"We're listening Oyabun." Raido said.

"Under no circumstances does anyone attack civilians or bystanders, even in accidents. As long as we keep the bloodshed entirely on the Yakuza, we can avoid much of the fallout from this little war. If even a single civilian is killed, the JSDF will get involved and that will severely complicate things for everyone."

"We must also avoid any foreign casualties as well." Yoshida continued. "Any foreign deaths, especially if they're from the America or Europe, will have a good possibility of foreign militaries getting involved. We cannot survive if a specialized NATO or UN anti-terrorism or anti-extremism operation is conducted. There is no doubt that the Government will approve of foreign aid if we cause too many deaths."

"So, when the attack begins, only target who you are assigned. Avoid killing innocent people and ensure that we don't get internationally labeled as a terrorist organization. We are already straining our relationship with the police due to the war already. We don't need some politician, either domestic or international, trying to make our way illegal."

"If anyone attacks or hurts a civilian, either by accident or intentionally, I will make sure you suffer just as much as I will when I deal with the fallout. Understood?" Yoshida concluded.

The Commanders nodded in agreement, which Eren did as well. Avoiding innocent deaths is something that Eren agreed with, even if Yoshida was doing it entirely to save his own skin. This Yuen or Nayto sounded like some kind of alliance or coalition, similar to the

global alliance. If they did get involved, Eren's potential crimes would become larger than a single country.

"If there is nothing more to discuss, I will conclude this meeting." He said. "Eren, why don't you stay for some food, we have a personal waiter who is bringing us our menu's. It'll be a good meal while you watch the performance."

"Sure." Eren shrugged.

"Are you going to do the after show meet the idol or wait till tonight for that." Raido laughed.

Eren remained silent, knowing that they're teasing him. He really didn't care for their lighthearted jokes, especially when he knew they'd use Ai in a heartbeat to manipulate him.

Eren looked out the window and saw the beginning of the performance. Ai and the rest of B-Komachi came out on stage, the lights shined down on them as they addressed the crowd. The crowd had their glowing sticks that they used to wave around in a show of entertainment. It still looked so strange to him.

Ai did look pretty, and she was excited for this performance since it was one of their fan favorite songs, Our Sign is B, followed by Yoasobi or something like that. She said she was going to try her hardest to make Eren love this performance for more than just her drive.

Ai smiled as she spoke to the crowd, her wide-open mouth smile made Eren's face slowly morph into his own smile, though he crushed it since he was still surrounded by criminals.

"Here he is now." Yoshida said as the waiter entered the VIP booth. "I'll recommend something good for you boy, it'll be my treat."

"That's fine with me." Eren said, though if it's for free. "What about some steak?" Eren asked.

This entire time he's had noodles or meat type stews from either places he's gone to or whatever Ai cooked. He was actually craving some beef and steak, something that he hasn't had since before they left to cross the sea.

Even after they reclaimed the walls, meat was still a rarity. It takes time to raise large amounts of cattle, even with all the new land and space they had. It was predicted that it would take at least a decade before there was enough meat to make it cheap and available.

"Extra salt." Eren said.

Salt was another rarity and his favorite spice. This world had an abundance of it, every restaurant had it at every table. Maybe the sea was so infinitely full of salt if they could afford to just put glass vials at every table and not be worried about it being stolen.

Right before Yoshida was going to place the order, the waiter reached behind his back. Eren saw the movement and knew from his own usage of his pistol what he was doing. Eren saw a small black object get pulled from his back.

"Watch out!" Eren yelled as he dove at the waiter, tackling him to the ground before he had a chance to pull his pistol.

Eren tried to wrench it from his hand and did so easily. This man was a simple fall guy, a sacrificial pawn that they didn't intend to survive. He was weak and clumsy, allowing Eren to disarm him.

The other bosses jumped up in alarm, guards armed with pistols barged in, making sure that their leadership was ok.

"A fucking assassin?" Yoshida asked.

Yoshida knelt down to the man as Eren held him down. He could see the tattoos from under his collar since it was disturbed from the fight. Eren could tell he was a Yakuza member, and based on the context, this was a Nakano-Kai assassin.

The assassin started speaking in his native tongue, which caused Yoshida to raise his eyebrow at the conversation. Eren had no idea what he was saying, but Yoshida was getting worried.

"What's he saying?" Eren asked.

"He says he has a message for you Eren." Yoshida said.

"What is it?" Eren asked.

"They're here to kill Ai." Yoshida said as Eren's eyes widened.

"The hell?" Eren gasped.

"They are going to kill her at the end of her second song, a gunman will get on the stage." He translated.

"Son of a-" Eren said angrily. "Why is he telling us?" Eren asked.

"He said the boss wanted you to know, that's all he has to say."

Eren took a deep breath in as he clenched his fist in anger.

"They have gunmen in the catwalks above the stage!" Yoshida said as the assassin said more. "They're going to shoot into the crowd, what the hell are they planning?"

"We're going to need to stop that." Raido said. "If either Ai or a single civilian dies, we're going to be in a world of pain from the Government."

"Eren, you go with Raido and get to the catwalks." Yoshida ordered.

"To hell with that, I need to get to the stage." Eren refused.

"Listen." Raido began. "You won't be able to reach the stage from that massive crowd, you'll get completely held up. We'll hit the catwalks and you can get down to the stage from there. They always have safety ropes so you can climb down. It's the fastest way."

"Fine." Eren said as he heard the music start.

Now that Ai's first song has started, Eren knew he had at best six or eight minutes. He knew songs usually go a few minutes, so he was going to need to move fast. If he didn't reach the stage in time, Ai was going to-

Eren took out his pistol from his belt. He opened the chamber to double check that there is a round. Being silent isn't an option here. He was going to have to go loud if he was going to reach Ai in time.

"Let's go." Raido said as he led Eren out the door.

Though he had to wonder, why was the assassin specifically delivering that message? Why not hide the information until after it was done. It didn't matter, first came Ai's safety.

And here we go with the ramp up lol.

The background check came back but of course, Ai will defend Eren and find anyway to protect him lol. It is kind of interesting that when someone questions if you were accurate, how you start to doubt yourself and double check. Like how the President was sure he got the number right, until Ai questioned him and made him doubt lol.

As for how the Yakuza are organized, to be honest I'm not too familiar. I'd assume they're similar to most organized groups with having different cells for specific jobs, but I don't know lol. Truthfully, the organization is actually loosely based on Islamic groups, with things like direct action cells. I'm sure the Yakuza has something similar, just a different name.

So, here's a funny thing, when I ran the next chapter with my buddy, he said I am basically doing a John Wick scene. Now I have a confession, I never saw John Wick. Infact, I'm watching the first movie tonight lol. So, this upcoming scene is actually not inspired by John Wick lol.

Last thing, it actually makes sense for Eren to not recognize the name Shinomiya. Kaguya introduced herself to Ai in Japanese and to a non-native speaker, it just sounded like another Japanese word. So, Eren wouldn't recognize it at first. However, he'll learn the significance of the name once he turns on the news lol.

Anyway, hope you guys enjoyed this chapter.

Eren won't let Ai Die

Chapter 25: Eren won't let Ai Die

"Get ready girls, you're out in two minutes." President Saitou said.

"This'll be our biggest show yet." Nino said excitedly.

"I can't wait." Meimei agreed. "If we manage to do well here, the Tokyo Dome will be ours."

"We'll need to stay at our best." Watanabe said.

"Tell Ai that." Ari giggled.

"Why tell me?" Ai asked.

"Ai will be fine, she has her favorite fan in the crowd." Meimei teased.

"My favorite fans are backstage..." She glared, trying to hide her own blush.

"Good point." Meimei thought. "Your third favorite fan." She giggled.

"Is Aqua still her favorite?" Ari joked. "Ai might as well get a leash with how much she's been watching him."

"And I will never let him out of my sight again." Ai laughed with her friends.

"I was half expecting to have to prevent you from dragging him on stage." Meimei giggled.

"The thought did occur to me." Ai joked.

"Ten seconds, get your show face on girls." Saitou said as he prepared the girls to rush out to the stage.

Ai took a deep breath, relaxing the muscles on her face and making her expression entirely neutral. She needed to center her focus and prepare to fully delve into her idol persona. She always wore the persona, but in these moments of the performance is when it needed to not only be present, but slightly exaggerated.

Her mind flashed to Eren for a moment, knowing that he was somewhere in the crowd. She wondered if he purchased any glowsticks to swing around with. He might find it enjoyable.

Oh no, she forgot to tell him the meaning of the colors, how each color represented an idol on stage and how you picked the color based on which idol you wanted to support. She'd probably have to hit him if he even thinks about picking the wrong color. Him not knowing the meaning is no excuse for not picking hers, she joked to herself.

She did hope she could catch a glance at him though. She wanted to see the look on his face as he watched, hopefully enjoying this performance more. She wanted Eren to look at her with that same look of awe and wonder he had when he saw the ocean. Nothing would fill her heart with more joy than for him to gaze at her with that same look.

"And, now!" Saitou motioned for the girls to get on stage.

Ai's neutral face changed into her perfectly crafted smile, the one she practiced after imitating her smile from the day her babies did the Otaku dance. It felt easier to adopt this smile today for some reason, it felt a lot less forced and easier to maintain.

With a skipping step, all the girls walked out onto the stage, staying in beat with the initial playing of the song. Our Sign is B was their signature song, and the one they either would play at the beginning or end of their show, depending on what songs were lined up. Today,

it was their first one since the President wanted to make sure that their fan favorite song would be performed while the scouts were watching and while they were fully rested.

Ai went immediately into the performance, taking her microphone and singing and dancing on the stage. One of the most difficult things to performing on stage was maintaining your composure while at the same time ensuring your voice and dancing skills were at top form. There was no room for errors or hesitation. They had it so well practiced that it was almost second nature.

Ai glanced around to see if she could see Eren but was unable to. There were more people here than ever before, so she wasn't surprised that she couldn't see him. Especially if he was either in the middle of the crowd or to the rear.

She wondered if she would see him dance like many other fans. It would probably be completely uncoordinated, she remembered Eren saying he never danced before. Somehow, the thought of Eren flailing around with no practice or ability to dance, but trying anyway, was the cutest thing she could imagine.

She should have asked Miyako to stay with him and take a video, just in case he tried to.

She felt like this performance was her best yet, she was so completely focused on making a perfect performance. Meimei of course was amazing, she always was the best dancer and deserved more recognition over Ai for her talents. Ai was always sad that her friend never got the attention she deserved.

While they both had a rivalry when they first performed together, it changed into a deep level of professional respect and personal friendship. Meimei changed after getting married, and even before when Ai had children. At first, she was angry at the hiatus Ai had to take, but she eventually began to be happy she never got as popular. After seeing the hurdles Ai had to go to for secrecy, Meimei was glad that she was more in the background now.

Ai had a suspicion that Meimei would have quit a while ago after her marriage, but only stayed to ensure B-Komachi made it big before she did. Meimei still was the second most popular idol in the group and would be hurtful to their prospects if she quit. To her though, it was a hobby now, since all she wanted to do was settle down with her husband and have children of her own.

After their first song, things settled down a lot more. The music died down and this gave Ai her chance to address the crowd.

"Thank you all for coming!" Ai said loudly and passionately into the microphone. "We're so happy to have all of you here, and we hope you enjoy the concert! I love you all!"

Ai made a heart with her hands, cocked her hip to the side, and winked at the audience. They exploded in cheers and applause, almost deafening her with how many there were. Even as the music for their next song started, it was barely able to drown out the noises of the crowd.

Their next song was an interesting one, a song about being an idol, ironically just called "Idol". It was a newer song and wasn't as popular as many of their other songs, but it would be a good transition for some of their other fan favorites.

Ai started dancing as the music began, moving with grace that only Meimei was able to match or even exceed. Her feet were already starting to get sore from the dancing and she was starting to feel sweat on her brow and under her clothes. Normally, the concert was kept cool in order to prevent the girls from sweating and ruining their makeup, but there was only so much that could be done.

Ai vaguely thought she heard weird banging sounds, as if there was something wrong with the audio equipment. There may be some technical issues, but regardless they had to continue with the show. She didn't bother with the weird sound and just continued to dance and sing for her fans.

A few moments, she almost slipped, but those were normal. Most people never see or notice those slight mistakes, but she was a bit worried that the scouts would. They were keeping a very critical eye on the performance after all.

Finally, the song ended right as the girls posed at the final lyric. Things quieted down significantly, minus the cheering of the fans. Ai took a moment to catch her breath, getting exhausted from the performance.

She looked into the crowd, and right in the front, moving closer, was Eren. He seemed like he was rushing to the front, as if he wanted to get a better spot. She smiled at him when she met his eyes, hoping he was having a good time.

However, she noticed that his eyes looked different. Like he was worried about something. Was everything ok? She heard combat veterans didn't typically like being in crowds from their experience, but hoped that he was ok.

"Excuse me sir, we need to ask you to leave the st-" Meimei said as she turned to Ai's left.

Sometimes, a fan would try to get on stage and typically security would have to remove them. Stages were designed to prevent this, but sometimes a fan would get up on stage.

Ai turned to look where Meimei did, and noticed an older man walking on stage. He was very skinny but dressed in a form fitting black suit. He looked to be around thirty, and Ai could notice a few tattoos peaking out from his sleeves.

He was confused as well but realized why Meimei hesitated. The man had a small gun in his hand. How did he even get a gun to begin with?

The man aimed directly at Ai, who was frozen like a deer in the headlights. She couldn't move or react, the situation completely alien

to her and not yet able to comprehend what was happening. She never had a gun pointed at her before and didn't even register it at first.

She was going to die...

A Few Minutes Prior

Eren and Raido ran up to the catwalks above the stage, areas typically used for maintenance of the concert area but now being used as an attack point for the Nakano-Kai. Eren had his own gun drawn and ready to use, the engraved pistol shining as lights from the show below reflected off of it.

Raido was with him, carrying a small revolver that was also ready to be used.

"We'll need to do this quick, don't worry about noise. We'll hope that the concert is loud enough!" He screamed.

"What!?" Eren asked. "I didn't hear you!"

"Just fight!" Raido yelled again.

Eren could do that.

There were speakers on this particular catwalk, directly below them. Eren could barely hear as the music was going, Ai already starting her second song. It wasn't as loud as a gun shot, but up here, no one was likely to notice. Especially with the stage lights affixed to the catwalk which would blind anyone looking up and conceal the fight.

"There's a guy!" Raido yelled.

Eren looked over, and using one hand, pointed his pistol at the man and fired. The Yakuza member, who was carrying a shortened

Aykem without a stock, went down from the shot. Eren hit him directly in the head.

Eren ran over and noticed a few more on the catwalk. They saw Eren and Raido and turned to shoot at the men. Eren and Raido dived down onto the ground, staying prone as bullets went over their head. Before the Yakuza could react, Eren and Raido shot at them from the ground.

The men slumped over, one over the rail, as the two men got back up to continue fighting.

Eren looked over to Ai, still dancing and probably still at the start of her second song. He only had a few minutes to get down there.

Eren looked around for anything he could use. He saw a safety rope that was used to anchor workers to the catwalk for safety, so he picked it up and got ready to uncoil it. Right as he threw it over the catwalk rail, bullets started going by him.

Eren ducked down, unable to hide or take any cover from the rounds. He was lucky these guys were such terrible shots.

To the rear of the concert was another catwalk with more Nakano-Kai Yakuza, shooting at them from their position. Eren aimed with his pistol and fired back. The rounds missed mostly, but a few of them were able to hit someone. The distance was too much to accurately shoot, but it did cause the men to try and duck to avoid getting shot.

"I'll go around!" Raido yelled directly into his ear. "Keep them busy!"

Eren nodded as Raido ran back into the building, hoping to gain access to the second catwalk.

Eren took more shots from his kneeling position, hoping to keep them pinned down. He aimed a bit but was more concerned with keeping them pinned. A few rounds impacted near him on the

catwalk, causing shrapnel to hit him, but nothing that even broke the skin.

Eren got disarmed when one round hit his gun. The sudden shock caused him to drop his gun and it fell off the catwalk and into the crowd. He cursed his luck but was glad his hand didn't get injured. It was numb from the sudden impact, but the bullet glanced off the gun and away from him.

After this fight, Raido finally flanked on that side and gunned down the remaining men. They didn't even realize he was there due to the extreme noise.

Eren decided now was the moment he had to slide down. Eren hoped over the rail and got on the rope. He started to make his way down in an over under grip in order to avoid rope burn. He locked his legs around the rope which allowed him to quickly get down.

The rope ended a few feet above the ground, so he had to drop the rest of the way. Eren landed on a member of the crowd, but no one was hurt. He briefly looked around for his gun but couldn't find it, so he didn't waste time and started pushing people out of the way in order to get to the stage.

Eren was now within visible range of Ai, he could see her, and he saw her smile directly at him. Her song was over, and he knew she was about to die. He needed to move faster in order to get her off the stage.

He noticed to his right that the Yakuza boss was walking directly to her on the stage. Ai looked as well and was frozen from seeing the man.

Eren continued to struggle as he pushed past more people, needing to get there as fast as he could. He gritted his teeth as he pushed, hoping, praying, doing anything to make sure he would reach her in time.

He couldn't let Ai die. He just couldn't. She was too important. She had children, a good life, a promising future. Even then, Eren felt another reason why she can't die, but he was too fixated on reaching her that he couldn't think of what that reason was right now.

He was too late. Even as he got to the front of the crowd, the stage directly in front of him, the boss was already pointing his pistol at Ai. She was frozen in fear, unable to do anything to preserve her life.

Eren looked around and saw a bottle that one of the patrons was holding. It looked like some kind of beer bottle, no doubt smuggled in since Ai said that no glass containers were allowed in the concert.

Eren stole the half empty bottle and quickly threw it right at the gun of the boss. Right before he pulled the trigger, the bottle hit his hand, causing the surprise to make him drop the gun.

At that moment, the crowd and music went almost silent. People in the back who couldn't see what was going on were still cheering, but their cheers were dying down slowly as they realized what was happening.

Eren got onto the stage and sprinted over to the boss. He looked over his shoulder as Eren tackled him into the ground.

"Holy shit." He said as Eren tackled him. "I didn't think you'd get here in time."

Eren started to punch him while straddling the man. He hammer fisted his face, hoping to knock him out. The man blocked each hit with his arms, but it was starting to wear on him.

The boss used his hips and legs to push Eren around, rolling so that he was now on top of Eren. Eren's legs were still around his waist, so he locked his feet, pushed his hips up, and squeezed his thighs in order to limit the boss's breathing. With his hips in the air, the Yakuza boss was unable to reach Eren.

The boss used his elbows to pry Eren's legs apart and twisted his body in order to escape. Both men got to their feet as they stared each other down, Eren made sure he was between Ai and the boss.

The boss made the first move by closing the distance and started to punch Eren. Eren traded some blows, but both men were able to effectively block or parry each other's attacks. Eren didn't back away, trying to prevent him from getting closer to Ai.

Eren ducked under a punch and went for the boss's legs, sweeping him up and pinning him again. The boss reached out and hugged Eren, pinning their bodies together and preventing Eren from punching.

He wrapped his arm around Eren and got him into a headlock, in a position similar to his first fight with Reiner, but now reversed. Eren tucked his chin to his chest, which prevented the boss's arm from getting his neck.

"You're still a bit weak from the warehouse." He laughed. "But still good, honestly I was hoping to kill her right as you walked up. Guess my timing was a bit off."

He kept his voice low, so only Eren could hear him.

Eren used his superior strength to break the headlock and move his body away. Each man now started punching each other, with Eren in a dominant position so it was much more effective.

Eren was rolled again by the boss, who started to rain down his own hammer punches onto Eren. Eren had one hand pinned by his leg so he could only block with one arm. Some punches hit their target and Eren felt his nose break from some of the hits.

Eren bumped his hips up again, rolling so that now he was on top and delivered his own punches.

This continued a few times, each man trading a blow and causing bruises and cuts on each other's faces. The areas of the stage they were on started to have blood stain the wood. Eren and the boss had blood coming out of their nose and cuts on their mouth as they traded blows.

Eren was put on the bottom again but reached out with his hands and grabbed the boss's neck. It was a weak technique, but he needed some kind of advantage. He choked the boss and pulled his body close to him, hoping to at least asphyxiate him if he couldn't get a corrugated artery choke.

"What makes you think you can kill her?" Eren asked. "If you do, there is nothing stopping me from hunting you down."

"Gawk!" He choked. "Thaght's ta idea." He wheezed through the choking.

What?

He slammed his arms down in Eren's elbows, breaking the choke. In a form of mockery, he started choking Eren as well in the same manner.

"I don't want anything to hold you back. The opposite actually. I want you to be angry and pissed. I want you to hunt me down and stop at nothing to kill me. What point is a war if you're not at your best?" He laughed. "I want everyone involved. Yakuza, Police, everyone. Especially you with your skill."

Eren could feel his head hurting from the lack of air to his lungs, getting dizzy from the choke.

"So, I'll tell you this. I won't stop in trying to kill her. Whether you try to kill me to either protect or avenge her makes no difference to me. As long as you commit to this war and do whatever you can to fight me at your best."

Eren did the same technique, slamming his hands down on the boss's elbows and making him lose his grip. He pushed back to get into a seated position and got up. Eren was about to get him in another grapple, but the boss aimed a small vial at him before he could.

Eren's eyes exploded in a burning pain. He tried to wipe the substance off but the more he wiped his eyes the more it hurt. What the hell was this stuff!?

"Pepper spray is a bitch." He laughed, his voice getting quieter as he walked away.

Eren knew he was heading to Ai and tried to flail around in order to find him. He was completely blinded and couldn't see.

Ai was towards the edge of the stage, eyes widened in shock and fear at what she just watched. Meimei and the rest of the girls were as well, huddled together from the fear of the criminal who were walking towards them. The crowd still in the concert area, but all struggling to escape through the small narrow doors.

The Yakuza drew a knife and approached Ai in a fast walk, hoping to kill her and then get away as quickly as possible before Eren recovered.

"Fuck!" He screamed as he fell down from the pain in his leg. He tried to get up but started getting hit repeatedly by what felt like a metal pipe.

" *Aqua!* " Ai screamed, forcing herself to move.

Aqua took a pipe from backstage and ran out onto the stage, intending to protect Ai. He might be weak, but a metal pipe will do damage no matter what. He hit the man repeatedly, hoping to hit him in the head and knock him out if nothing else. He wasn't going to let Ai die.

However, the man covered his head from the blows, grabbing the pipe and wrenching it out of his hand. He threw it away and stabbed Aqua with the knife.

" *NO!* " Ai screamed.

Aqua blocked it at the last second, but the knife imbedded itself into his forearm, amazingly getting directly between the bones in his arm. As a doctor, he knew that this was a dangerous injury since there is a chance it could hit an artery in his arm.

Ai ran up and kicked the man in the face while he was kneeled. It was a weak and uncoordinated kick and did nothing to really slow him down. The man got up and pushed Ai away, who fell to the ground.

There was a scream, no, a roar from behind the boss. The roar sounded almost as loud as the concert or gunshots in the room. It was so loud, even Ai and the girl covered their ears for a moment.

Ai looked over to Eren, who was screaming and charging at the man who threatened her and her child. His face was contorted in anger, a more feral and dangerous face than the cold and calculated one he had when he killed Ryosuke. Like a rabid, bloody animal that was cornered and wanted only to kill.

He slammed into the man from behind and lifted him up, doing a suplex and slamming the man into the ground. Eren wrapped his arm around the man's throat and tied to choke him from behind.

The boss tucked his own chin down, and the blood, spit, and mucus from the two men prevented Eren from getting a good grip. He used the slippery substances to twist out of Eren's grasp and stood back up.

The fight devolved into desperate and wild fighting from there. Both men gripped each other's shirts and punched each other in the face. No ground was lost from either side.

The boss pulled out a small switch blade and stabbed Eren right in the face. Eren moved out of the way, but the blade still hit his right eyebrow, causing it to glance and leave a long cut on his brow.

Eren head butted the boss, causing him to lose his grip and stumble backwards.

PING!

BANG!

The sound of a bullet impacting a piece of metal on the ground, followed by the bang a fraction of a second later, told Eren that someone shot at them. Eren looked at the source of the gunshot, which came from the catwalks. Was it Raido?

"Does the sniper belong to the old man?" The boss asked.

Eren remained silent, not sure what was going on. What was a sniper? He never heard of that before.

"Well, guess it's time for me to go."

"Wait!" Eren said, wanting to continue so he could kill him and keep Ai safe.

CRACK!

BANG!

The bullet impacted right in front of Eren, preventing him from continuing towards the boss.

"Give it up, the sniper won't let us fight." He said. "I don't want to kill you before the fun can start. I'll see you for dinner." He laughed as he jumped off the stage and ran into the crowd, using them as cover so he could escape unnoticed.

Dinner? Did he know about the plan to attack Ginza? Eren knew there was a rat in Yoshida's group, how much did the rat know?

" *Aqua -Chan!* " Ai yelled, bringing Eren back to the situation at hand.

She was far enough away that she didn't hear the exchange, much to Eren's relief. He didn't want her to know about his involvement. He was terrified of what she'd think of him if she found out who he was.

Ai crawled on her hands and knees to her son, who was clutching at his arm that had the knife imbedded in it. His face was scrunched up in pain, a few tears threatening to leak from his eyes, but he maintained his composure better than any child should.

" *It's ok baby, mama's here.* " Ai said as she adopted a gentle and soothing voice. " *We need to do something.* " She said to herself.

"Leave the knife in." Eren said.

"But he's hurt!" Ai said.

"It'll stop the bleeding until a professional gets here." Eren said.

Eren took off his shirt and ripped a piece of it off in a long strip. He used the white cloth to wrap around the arm and knife, stopping any excess blood flow from escaping.

" *It's ok, mama's here.* " Ai said, her tear-stained face was a look of fear and worry.

" *I'm ok Ai.* " Aqua said through gritted teeth.

" *Don't be tough right now, please.* " She whispered. " *Why would you do that? Why would you try to fight him?* "

" *I had to save you.* " He grunted as Eren finished tying it, causing pressure that made the pain worse.

" It's my job to save you, not the other way. " She said, a hint of anger coming from her voice. " You're so stupid, stupid. I have to punish you again. "

Ai didn't know what she was saying. Her tiny, vulnerable, and innocent baby boy was stabbed with a knife meant for her. This was the second time a knife meant for her was pointed at her baby boy. She couldn't think rationally.

" Ai, we need to get him outside. " Meimei said. " There'll be paramedics showing up soon, we need to go. "

" We'll take him through the back, if we need to, we can drive him to the hospital. " Ari said as well.

" Where's Ruby? " Ai asked, barely able to comprehend what's going on.

" The President evacuated her. " Miyako said as she came up to Ai. " She's ok, but we need to leave. "

" O-ok. " Ai said.

"We need to go, I'll carry him." Eren said.

"No, I have him." Ai said as she scooped Aqua into her arms. "I'll carry him to safety."

No one was going to take her son from her. She dared them to try, especially with how injured he was. Ai had no injuries at all, just some blood from the man on her leg when she kicked him, though the blood was caused by Eren.

Eren stayed with her, his own injuries doing nothing to slow him down as he stayed close and protected her. He was just as worried for Aqua and swore to protect he boy.

Eren grunted as the paramedic, as Meimei called it, finished the stitch on his brow. She snipped the line and made sure it was fully seated before pulling away. The paramedic said something, but Eren looked towards Meimei for translation.

"She said to brace yourself, she needs to reset your nose." Meimei said.

Eren shrugged, letting her work. He was sitting on a vehicle outside, a large box shape vehicle that was used by the healers in this world to transport people and medical gear to and from hospitals.

"Ready, one, two-" Meimei counted for the nurse.

CRACK!

Eren grunted as his nose was set back into place. The pain was minor and he barely felt it.

"You can take a hit." Meimei said.

"How's Ai?" Eren asked.

"She's with the other truck, she's getting looked at." Meimei said.

"How's Aqua?" Eren asked.

"He's in another truck, they're rushing him to the hospital. We're going to see him later tonight." She said.

Eren got up, grunting from the pain but it barely slowed him down. The blood and cuts were cleaned, but there was still bruising around his face from the fight. Even his neck had some bruising where he was choked. Most of the swelling was gone, but he still had a headache.

Ai was in the back, getting looked over. She looked ok, with no injuries of anykind, but the paramedic wanted to be sure she was ok.

Her boots were off, and Eren could see a bruise forming on her shin, where she kicked the boss.

"Ai." He said as he walked up to her.

"Eren." Ai replied when she saw him. "Oh no!" She gasped.

"What?" He asked.

Ai jumped away from the paramedic, much to her annoyance, and ran over to Eren. She wasn't too worried about being seen with him since the parking lot was completely sealed off and President Saitou prepared Non-Disclosure Agreement documents for the police and medics around.

It might be a bit odd to prepare something like that given the circumstances, however, leaked information about Ai would put her life in danger so it was a precaution he had to take.

"I was so caught up with Aqua-Chan, I didn't make sure you were ok." She said as she inspected Eren's face.

"That's fine." Eren said. "Your son is more important than me."

"Still, I'm so sorry." She said.

"It's ok." Eren said. "Are you ok?" Eren asked.

"I mean, yea, I guess." She said. "I'm not hurt, I mean, it's just a bruise. But I-I d-don't know a-about Aqu-" She started to tear up, thinking about her son.

Her arms were by her side as she started to sob. She was so completely scared and could barely maintain her composure. It was the first time he saw her cry like this. She looked so different, normally she'd always try to be happy and look on the bright side, but now she was scared and terrified for her son.

Eren walked over and placed her head in his chest. He wrapped his arms around her as she did the same on reaction. She sobbed into Eren's chest, which was still bare since his shirt was ripped.

Eren rubbed her back and placed one hand on her head, letting her get the emotions out and comforting her. Eren never was good at comforting people, but even he knew that sometimes a hug can go a long way in helping someone.

"He's a strong kid." Eren said.

"No, he isn't." Ai said. "He's tiny. He shouldn't have to fight a full grown man like that."

"He defended his mother." Something Eren failed to do.

"It's not his job." Ai cried. "I'm supposed to protect him. Why is he so stupid in thinking that he needs to protect me?"

"Because he loves his mother." Eren said. "He doesn't want to think about a life without you. And he'll do anything to protect you, even at great risk to himself."

"Did you do the same for your mama?" Ai asked.

"I tried." Eren said sadly.

"W-what happened?" She asked.

"My mother was pinned under a collapsed house. I tried desperately to pull it off of her... before they came." He struggled to remember. "She begged me to leave, but I refused. I had to save her. I had to pull it off of her. But I failed."

"Someone pulled you away." She concluded.

"Mr. Hannes pulled us away from her. And I watched her die, because I couldn't do anything." Eren recalled.

"I'm so sorry." Ai said as she broke from Eren's embrace. Her tears slowly drying.

"I never told her that I loved her." Eren said.

Ai remembered that he said that before. How he regretted not saying those words to his mother. It was around the time they shopped for new clothes for him.

Ai often wondered if Aqua really did love her. He never said it, and he never showed any affection. Not that she could blame him, she never once said she loved him. Why would he love her?

She saw similarities in Eren and her own son. Both head strong, lacking in affection, and clearly loved their mothers. Was this how Aqua felt? Were these his feelings as well? Did Aqua love her but was too proud and stoic to try and show any affection.

The only time he showed affection was when he was scared. Like when Eren first came into their lives, or when Ryosuke attacked, and even when he met Hikaru. Was that scared and vulnerable side the real him, and the stoic and serious side the lie he crafted? He was her son after all, so it was natural that he'd imitate her by creating a false persona.

Though, where Ai's persona was that of a cute innocent girl, his persona was a mature and serious boy. Was that what was going on?

She saw the childlike innocence in Eren's eyes when he was at the beach. Was it the same? Was Eren's real side a scared and vulnerable boy that he hid behind a wall of pain and anger? Was that the fate that Aqua would be condemned to face if he didn't feel a mother's love?

"I need my children." She said, her eyes starting to tear up again. "I need my babies."

"We'll see them." Eren said as he held her again. "Meyoko has Ruby with her and she's on the way to the hospital. We'll leave soon to see them."

"Ok." Ai said in a low voice. "You're mispronouncing her name on purpose." She giggled weakly.

"What makes you think that?" He laughed quietly as well. He didn't do that to make her feel better, not at all.

She needed to see both of her babies. Even if it was a lie, they needed to hear the words that their mama loved them. As much as it would break her if it was a lie, she cared more about their feeling than her own.

She swore that when she next saw them, she would say she loved them. Even if it was a lie. They deserved to hear those words from their mama.

So, John Wick was awesome lol. I was joking how similarly I accidentally made Eren to John Wick, though less gunfu lol.

A couple of things, I did kind of modify the sounds and realism here lol. Most guns are about 140 Decibels, while concerts can get to 120 Decibels. I know that it's not exactly the same, but it would kind of work lol.

As for why I'm still keeping Eren's involvement a secret, it's not ready for him to be exposed... yet lol. There will be consequences for that overt display on stage, but Eren won't be found out just yet. Not the right time in the story for that lol.

It'll seem a little odd, but most of it will be explained next chapter.

Anyway, hope you guys enjoyed.

I Love You and it's Not a Li

Chapter 26: I Love You and it's Not a Lie

Eren sat down in the hospital room where Aqua was being kept. As soon as he was taken to the Hospital, they immediately put him under and used their special technology to not only remove the blade but also wrap up the wound. He was still asleep in the bed, and should be waking up today.

Ai was by his bed, sitting on a chair and her head resting on the bed. She refused to leave his side and fell asleep. Eren put a blanket over her body to keep her warm as she slept. She looked peaceful for the first time since yesterday.

Ruby was asleep on the floor, using a blanket as a makeshift Futon and another one to keep her warm. When they came into the hospital room, Miyako and Ruby were already there, Ruby being asleep already since it was very late, and she was tired from the events at the concert. Ai made sure to stay quiet so as not to wake her up.

Eren felt the morning sun hit his eyes through the window. I was very early in the morning, and he didn't sleep at all. He was tired, but he was still in combat mode. He stayed awake to keep an eye out to protect the young mother and her children. Plus, his mind was too busy to allow him to rest.

He almost lost Ai, and worse, she nearly died because of him. He was the one who put her in danger. Sergei warned him, how other people would be used against him. Eren was foolish and didn't listen to him. He decided to do what he always did, fight and move forward while damning the consequences. He never cared who's life he would ruin, as long as he kept moving forward.

But now, Ai's life was in danger. She was being used to provoke him into a fight. Eren cared for her, and her children. She was a very good woman and an amazing mother. She didn't deserve to be used as a pawn to get at him.

It was too late now. Eren's own foolishness and rash behavior put her and her family in danger. She'd be safe now if he never came into her life.

Eren looked at Ruby. She was adorable, a kind, sweet, and innocent girl who loved her mother and enjoyed her life. It was hard not to care for her, especially with how much she tried to speak English.

Aqua was like looking in a mirror. That same rash attitude and complete lack of consideration for his mother's feelings. He knew Aqua cared for his mother, but he never showed it, not outwardly though. He wished Aqua didn't have to go through the same feelings that Eren did as a child.

Eren had no doubt, that if the boss killed Ai, Aqua would devote his life to destroying the Yakuza. He'd have the same crazed look of vengeance and anger that Eren had the day he swore to kill the Titans. Aqua was exactly like him in many ways.

Eren put his head into his hands, the severe headache and pain just wouldn't go away. He forgot how much of an annoyance it was to not instantly heal from wounds. He could also tell that he would scar, since the cut on his brow would no doubt scar and remain permanent. Eren would take all the downsides of being a shifter just to be able to heal instantly again. The dull, consistent pain was so annoying.

Suddenly, Eren heard shifting coming from Aqua's bed. It seems like the boy was waking up.

Aqua didn't remember where he was or what happened before he went to sleep. He struggled to piece anything together, feeling like

he's waking up from a long and dreamless sleep. He looked around to consider where he was.

He was in a hospital room. It made sense since he was stabbed in the arm. Said stab wound wasn't hurting at all though, so he was probably given pain medication. There was an IV in his non-injured wrist and a sling for his injured hand, which was wrapped up in gauze. He didn't fully know what the extent of the damage was or how they treated him.

He wasn't a doctor in trauma like this, but knew he nearly had his artery cut. A primary artery runs under the armpit, down the inside of the arm, and through the wrist. Two of the worst places to be lacerated are the wrist and the armpit, which can cause extreme hemorrhaging and even death.

Not counting the tendons, nerve bundles, and other vital things that ran through the wrist and partially into the forearm. He wondered how much of the damage would be permanent.

"Aqua?" He heard a quiet voice say next to him.

Ai was waking up, her head resting on the side of his bed. She slowly opened her eyes as she felt Aqua shift and move.

"Hey Ai." He greeted.

Ai shot up from her laying position and grabbed him, holding her baby boy to her chest. The fear and panic she had began to subside in complete relief as he woke up. He was awake and therefor alive. She could barely contain her relief.

"Thank goodness." She breathed a sigh of relief.

He glanced around and saw his sister on the floor and Eren, who was awake, sitting on a chair in the corner of the room. He had a neutral expression and scanned the room, barely looking his way.

He looked worse than the last time he was in the hospital, stitches on his face, dried blood, and a bruised face. He had a shirt on though, one wrinkled and probably borrowed from someone a size slightly too big for him.

"Mama?" Ruby woke up from her own sleep from the noise around her.

Ruby bolted up and darted for Ai, hugging her leg while i held Aqua. She looked just as relieved that everyone was ok.

"Come here Ruby-Chan." Ai said as she lifted Ruby up and placed her on the side of the bed.

Ai put both of her hands on her children's heads, barely able to believe that they were all ok after what happened. She gently rubbed their heads with her thumbs. Both of them stared at her, Ruby with a look of sad confusion while Aqua looked at her with a look of worry.

"You're both ok." She sighed.

"Not Aqua though." Ruby pointed out. "He got hurt."

"She knows." He said, glaring at her. Now was not the time to remind her of that.

"Speaking of which..." Ai began. "What is wrong with you Aqua-Chan? Why did you try to fight that man?"

"I couldn't let him hurt you." Aqua said. "I won't let you get hurt Ai."

He swore he would protect Ai, and whether it was as Goro or Aqua, he would always protect her.

"I'm your mother Aqua, it's my job to protect you." She said.

"I had to protect you." He said.

"I made you a promise Aqua-Chan." Ai said. "A promise that nothing would take me away from you. Why didn't you believe that?"

Was she serious? It doesn't matter what she promised, she's human and can easily die like anyone else. She had a life, something to live for. He never should have existed. He died as Goro, and instead of passing on, he robbed Ai of a normal child. It's better for him to die than her.

However, she wasn't thinking clearly. He knew that. She was sad and upset, because he still was her son. And she's right, a mother protects her child, not the other way around. But he refused to let her sacrifice herself for him or standby and let her die.

"Weren't you scared Aqua-Chan?" She asked.

"Not really." He shrugged.

Aqua wasn't afraid of his own death, he was afraid of Ai dying. He gets that it wasn't normal for a child to not be afraid of being killed, but it already happened to him before. He couldn't force himself to lie to her and say he was scared.

"There's something I want to tell you, tell you both." She said as she held her children.

"What?" Aqua and Ruby asked.

"I know I've never said it before, but I want you both to know that..." She paused, so terrified to say the words out loud.

"What is it?" Aqua asked.

"I..." She struggled to say.

They had to know, even if it was a lie. No matter how much she was destroyed by the lie, she needed them to hear the words. Lying was easy for her. She lied for years to her fans and her children would be

no different. If anything, it would be easier for them to believe since they're so young.

So, just say it. Say it now and every day from there. Say it so her children can experience the feelings of love that she never had. The feeling of being loved and loving in return. Her own feelings and pain didn't matter at all, only theirs.

"I love you." She finally said. "I love you both so much."

Nothing. Where was the feeling of dread she was expecting? The feeling of lying to the people most important to her? Where was the sinking feeling that she was expecting to have?

Instead, she had a feeling of warmth in her gut. Like it was the easiest and most natural thing to say. As if the moment the words came out of her mouth, it felt natural and normal to say. Why was it different?

"Ok?" Aqua said in confusion.

OK? Just, ok?

"I love you too mama." Ruby said normally, as if it was natural to do so. "Why are you acting funny?"

Why? Because it's a lie. It had to be a lie. It had to feel the same as every other time she said it. But it didn't. It felt... real. It felt normal and something she should have said a long time ago.

"Yea, what's wrong?" Aqua asked. "I love you too I guess." He shrugged.

His stoic attitude stayed, even after Ai was having so many issues coming to terms with what was going on. She said those words. She admitted to loving someone, and it wasn't a lie. It was real, a real feeling of warmth.

Is this love? Is this what it feels like? Is this what it feels like to be completely and fully honest with a person about how you feel about them?

"It wasn't a lie..." Ai said to herself.

"What wasn't?" Aqua asked.

"I never said I loved you two." She said.

"Ok?" Aqua said in a questioning pause.

"Didn't you wonder if I did love you?" She asked.

How can they just react like nothing happened!?

"Why would we?" Ruby asked.

"I never said it." Ai said.

"So?" Ruby asked. "Who cares if you never said it. You always showed you loved us. Like when you breast fed me-" Aqua slapped his forehead, Ruby's not supposed to remember that since she was an infant at the time. "-or when you would make us dinner when you're tired after rehearsal or let us come and watch your shows. Or how you'd let me sleep cuddled up with you at night."

They knew? They knew that she loved them? Did she? Yes... she did love them. She felt it, the feeling of loving someone and being loved.

"I mean, it is obvious Ai." Aqua said.

"Obvious?" She asked.

"Do you really think you'd get so upset about me running away if you didn't love me?" He asked.

How were her children more aware of her feelings than she was? It made no sense.

"Seriously, what's wrong?" Aqua asked.

"I never was loved Aqua-Chan." She admitted to her son. "I never had a papa or mama who loved me. So, I never felt what it was like. When you were born, you and Ruby-Chan, I never said those words because I was afraid it would have been a lie. And if it was a lie; I'd be so heart broken. So, I wanted to say it today to you. Even if it was a lie, at least you both would feel loved. But... it's not a lie. I am telling the truth. I can say those words, and it's completely true."

"I never once doubted that you loved us, Ai." Aqua said.

"Yea mama, I knew you loved us." Ruby confirmed.

"How?" She asked, barely able to comprehend what was going on.

"If you didn't love us, you wouldn't do nearly the amount you did for us." Aqua said.

"I love you." Ai said to them, confirming that it was indeed the truth.

"Yea, we love you too." Aqua said.

"I love you." Ai said again, having to confirm it one more time.

"Eto... I know..." He said.

Ai swore a long time ago that she'd never cry in front of her children. No matter how much pain she was in or how much stress she felt, she'd always smile and show them strength to make them feel safe. Even as scared as she was with Ryosuke, she still maintained a strong and loving front.

However, this broke that personal promise. She couldn't stop herself from crying. The fear she had for so many years, the fear of not

loving her children, was now no longer there. The largest fear she had was now completely gone. Completely lifted off her shoulders.

"I love you!" She cried as she held her babies to her chest as she sobbed.

It was so stupid; how could she break down in front of them?

Aqua was so surprised. He never knew she struggled so much with that. He found it weird that she never said it but chalked that up to her being the type to express love through actions instead of words. He never once doubted that she loved them.

Though, he had no idea that her rough childhood had such an effect on her. He never considered that she would have grown up emotionally stunted compared to other people. In some ways, she's probably still emotionally a child since she never grew out of the trauma she experienced. Especially with the isolation of being a single mother who had to hide from the world due to her life as an idol.

She also wondered if he loved her. He never considered that she would believe that he didn't. Aqua did love Ai, both as a mother in a way, and as a person. He fell in love with her as Goro thanks to Serina, though not in a romantic way. Ai represented the innocence that Serina made him feel. He loved her because Serina loved her, and in this new life, he loved her for who she was.

But he was emotionally stable and came to terms with his insecurities years ago. She never did. She was still so young and just barely out of her teenage years. Plus, without knowing that he was reincarnated, she probably interpreted his lack of expressing love as him not loving her.

Truthfully, it was weird to act like a loving child. He was an adult, and it was weird to treat a woman half his age as his mother. He loved Ai, but it was hard showing it like a child. He never once considered she'd think he had doubts about loving her.

Ruby was just as confused as he was. How could her mother not believe that she loved her? Ruby was as emotionally stunted as Ai, if not more so since she died as a twelve-year-old, abandoned in a hospital. But she always loved Ai. Ever since she saw her first concert on that stupid little TV in her hospital room. Ever since she bragged about how amazing Ai was to Doctor Goro.

And she knew Ai loved her. Her old parents said they loved her, but apparently that was a lie since they abandoned her. Ai on the other hand, she never once said it, but there wasn't a single day that she doubted that Ai loved her.

Ruby just couldn't comprehend why Ai was sad or so conflicted. To her, it was natural.

Ai separated herself from her children. Her sobbing quieted down, and her tears stopped flowing. Her face was still red from the tears, but she was able to compose herself.

"I'm sorry." She said to her children.

"Don't be mama." Ruby smiled at her. "I should have said I loved you too, so it's mine and Aqua's fault."

His fault too? How was he supposed to-

His thoughts were cut off as Ai held her babies again. Kissing both of their heads as she smiled. She loved them so much.

Ai remembered something though.

She turned around and looked at Eren. He wasn't really looking at her, but he turned to face her when he noticed her looking at him. He raised his eyebrow, questioning why she was addressing him.

She completely forgot he was there! She must look so ridiculous right now, after crying and hugging her kids like that. And the things

she just said, it was so humiliating to have someone hear her admit all that.

But he not only saw it but heard every word. What was he going to think about her? Maybe he'd think she was crazy or something.

"Please forget you heard that!" She said to Eren.

Eren cocked his head, like he didn't understand her.

" *Were you talking to me?* " He asked.

" *Please don't remember what I said!* " She panicked, speaking in English.

" *I didn't understand a word.* " Eren said.

" *Wha-* " Wait...

" *Did you forget I can't comprehend Japanese?* " Eren asked.

" *Well-* " Yea, she did.

If Aqua wasn't stuck in Ai's arms, he would have facepalmed. Ai was hopeless sometimes.

"Hello, is this Hoshino Aqua's room?" A woman dressed in a white coat entered into the room.

"Yes, it is." Ai said as she addressed the doctor.

"Hoshino-San, I'm Doctor Kurumi and am going to check on your son, if that's ok." She said.

"I understand." Ai said.

The room was a little crowded, with President Saitou, Eren, Ai, Ruby, and Meimei all sitting in the chairs in the room. It was a double

patient room that was only used for Aqua right now since the hospital was trying to maintain his secrecy.

President Saitou had been running around the hospital, both trying to ensure that whoever looked at Aqua wasn't a fan of Ai's and idols in general and making sure to give them NDAs in order to keep their identity a secret. Saitou was currently in the corner of the room, taking a nap on the chair after staying awake all night.

"He'll be ok, right?" Miyako asked, worried for the boy she watched after for so long.

"Well, that's what we need to go over." The Doctor said.

Doctor Kurumi sat down on a seat next to Aqua and Ai. She took out a clip board that had the information from the operation last night. It was a quick thing since they were worried about the possibility of an artery being severed.

"Thankfully, every single artery and blood vessel is still intact. Amazingly, the knife missed everyone, which is very rare to happen in a case like this." She said.

"So, he'll make a full recovery?" Ai asked in a worried tone.

"We're not entirely sure yet." Doctor Kurumi said.

"What do you mean?" Ai asked.

"Some of the nerve bundles in his arm were damaged, so we do expect there to be some permanent damage. He may lose some strength in his arm and may lose some feeling as well." She said.

"Will Aqua be able to use his arm?" Ai's voice wavered.

"Thankfully, we expect there to be very minor permanent damage." Kurumi reassured her. "He likely won't be impeded in any way growing up and will likely still retain full use of his arm. As long as we let it heal properly."

"What do we need to do?" Ai asked.

"I've prepared a physical fitness plan for him." Kurumi handed her a sheet of paper. "Initially, he'll need to do exercises such as opening and closing his fist. After about a month, he should transition to squeezing a stress ball, then basic arm exercises a month after that. We need to make sure the muscle heals properly and make sure that his arm doesn't atrophy from lack of use."

"How long will he take to heal?" Ai asked.

"We expect him to be able to remove the sling after about two months. Since he's so young he should heal relatively quickly. After that, we recommend he doesn't do anything strenuous until he feels comfortable."

"I'll make sure he follows this plan to the letter." Ai said with determination.

"Please understand that this is a general guide." Doctor Kurumi said. "He shouldn't be pushed past what he feels is comfortable and should stop if he feels any strain or pain. Especially during the first week of recovery."

"I understand." Ai nodded.

"We'll also schedule regular checkups to make sure he'll be ok." She said. "We can have him discharged in an hour if you would all like to go home. All he'll need now is rest. We also will give some medication to prevent infection and pain, please only take as needed to avoid the possibility of him developing an addiction"

"Of course." Ai said.

After that, the Doctor checked with Aqua and got some of his vitals. She removed the IV and made sure the wrappings on his arm was still good and his sling was fully seated as well. Aqua winced a bit

from the contact, since without the IV giving pain medication, he was starting to feel the pain again.

The Doctor left and told them that they can leave and discharge Aqua when they were ready. Ai wanted to wait a bit so Aqua can get some of his strength back since he was still weak from the pain medications he was given during the operation.

"How are you doing little man?" Meimei asked Aqua.

"I'm ok." He said.

"Such a tough little guy." She giggled. "Do you know how much you worried your mama?"

"I can guess." He shrugged.

"Can you imagine if he ever falls in love?" Meimei asked Ai.

"What do you mean?" Ai asked.

"I mean, a four-year-old fighting a full grown Yakuza member?" She pointed out. "Imagine if he gets a girlfriend and someone ever hurts her."

"Ehhh." Ai disapproved. Her baby was too young to consider thinking about girlfriends.

Besides, she'd have to make sure that any girl who dates him is ok. She didn't want him finding a girl that's no good for him.

"Oh, calm down Ai." Meimei giggled. "With the way he grows up, he'll be popular with girls."

"No." Ai shook her head.

"By the way, have you checked Social Media?" Meimei asked.

"I didn't have time." Ai said.

"You should Ai." Miyako chimed in. "A lot happened last night and this morning."

Ai raised her eyebrow and took out her phone. She navigated to Twitter and looked through some of the most recent posts about the concert. Of course, there were reactions on the actual attack, mostly people terrified of why the Yakuza would attack a concert, but what was odd was their reaction to Ai.

As if Ai couldn't be more amazing, she risks her life to save a random kid!

Ai truly is an angel. She puts her own life on the line to save a kid.

The mama of the kid must be so happy that Ai protected him.

"Luckily, everyone thinks Aqua was some random kid." She said. "Your popularity is skyrocketing right now from protecting him."

"Of course, I protected him." Ai said. "He is my son."

"Yea, but no one knows that." Miyako said. "From their perspective, you attacked a Yakuza member to save a kid."

"Plus, there's the posts on Aqua." Meimei said. "People are already piecing together that he's the Otaku dancing kid from a while back. So, they're losing their minds over how much of a dedicated and protective fanboy he is."

"Wow." Ai said.

Aqua was a bit upset at that. He's supposed to keep as low a profile as possible. It was unavoidable of course, but it doesn't change the fact that now his face is all over social media again.

"What about Eren?" Ai asked.

Eren perked his head up, confused as to why he was addressed. He didn't understand what they were saying but recognized his name.

" *Eren-San, want to see how popular you are?* " Meimei asked.

" *Popular?* " He asked.

" *Yea, come look.* " She said.

Eren stood up and walked over to the phone that Ai was holding. It showed a video of the fight from last night, but that confused Eren.

" *Wait, they have a moving picture of the concert?* " Eren asked.

" *Uh... yea?* " Meimei said.

So, anyone can see concerts, even if they're not there? From the small little moveable phone? At any time? He thought concerts were like plays in his own world. You only saw it if you went. Apparently, people can watch them whenever they want.

" *Why even go to a concert if you can just watch it whenever you want?* " He asked.

" *Is he serious?* " Miyako asked.

" *How do you not know how videos work?* " Meimei asked. "
Seriously, how rural is rural here? I don't even know if that's a red flag. It's just so weird. "

Eren glared at her. She should be perfectly aware by now that his home is very much lacking in technology.

" *Leave him alone Meimei.* " Ai said.

" *Seriously, the Renaissance ended Eren. Come back to the 21st Century.* " Eren had no idea what those terms meant.

" *Here.* " Ai said. She translated all of the Twitter posts that talked about Eren.

This guy is insane!

Did you see that MMA? He has to be a professional fighter.

This man saved our Ai. We need to find him and reward him.

If he thinks he can date Ai just because he saved her, he's wrong!

-Screw you. If anyone deserves Ai, it's this guy!

-He saved her, I don't see you doing anything!

" *Why are they arguing over that?* " Eren asked.

" *It's just social media, you get used to it.* " Ai giggled.

" *They want to meet me?* " Eren asked.

" *Yea, but you should be safe.* " Miyako said. " *With how injured your face is, no one will recognize you once you heal. Especially with how covered in blood you were.* "

Ai shuddered at that thought. She hated seeing Eren hurt in any way. Especially after the amount of damage he sustained protecting her. He was scary and terrifying, especially with how he yelled. That yell shook her to her core.

However, it was also attractive in a weird kind of way. That side of him was brought out when she was in danger. He only ever got like that when she was in danger, and it made her feel protected. Especially when normally, he is very calm and kind.

It was different than Hikaru, who treated her the same whether he was angry or kind. Eren was much scarier than Hikaru, but he only got scary to protect her. It was nice to feel protected by him.

"Someone's blushing." Meimei smiled.

"Quiet!" Ai said.

" There was also the news report that was posted this morning. "
Miyako said. " You should look it up. "

Ai took out her phone, went to YouTube, and searched the morning news that was broadcasted today. She helped translate for Eren.

" Last night, the B-Komachi concert was attacked by Yakuza gang members belonging to the Nakano-Kai and Inagawa-Kai. There seems to have been a battle between the two gangs, resulting in the loss of some members on both sides. Bodies of Yakuza members were found in the catwalks as well as some of the hallways. Luckily, no bystanders were hurt in the attack. "

" The police confiscated a couple of military grade guns, such as AKs and pistols from the fallen members and are able to get information on their origin. It seems like they are older Soviet and Chinese type guns, all purchased illegally from China. The Prime Minister has reached out to China, who is denying any involvement in the sales. "

" There was also the attack of the B-Komachi lead idol, Ai, who was nearly murdered by one of the gang members. She was saved by a bystander and young boy. Both are in the hospital and the police are not releasing their identities in order to protect them against potential retribution from the Yakuza. "

" One weapon found in the crowd, was the pistol that is believed to be from the Akuma No Ko. Police have identified fingerprints on the gun, however, none of the prints match anyone in the database. Since Akuma No Ko is a westerner, it is assumed that he is currently in Japan illegally and without a passport. At this time, it is predicted that he is working for the Inagawa-Kai, however this is just speculation. "

" This coming right after the disappearance of Shinomiya Kaguya, heir to the Shinomiya Conglomerate. The Shinomiya Conglomerate spokesperson has come out in saying that message was delivered to them by an unknown source, stating that she has been kidnapped

and is being held indefinitely. The police are being called in large numbers to conduct a search, but at this time there are no clues to her location. "

"Oh no..." Ai said sadly.

" *Shinomiya.* " Eren said to himself.

It was the same name that was mentioned in the meeting with the leaders.

" It's that poor girl we met when we looked for Aqua-Chan. " Ai said. " Kaguya, the black haired girl. She was kidnapped. "

Eren narrowed his eyes. The "Insurance policy" that Yoshida was referencing. He assumed it may have been some kind of blackmail or shady business deal that that Yakuza would keep, but it wasn't. It was the daughter of the head of the Shinomiya group. The bastard kidnapped a teenage girl to be used as leverage to manipulate her father.

" *Bastards.* " Eren whispered.

" I'm going to call her friends. " Ai said. " They'll need support. "

Eren was pissed that they decided to kidnap the girl. He wondered what he should do. Of course, the most instinctual answer would be to go in and rescue her. But if he does that...

Eren looked over at Ai, who was on the phone and talking with the group they met. If he did turn against Yoshida and save Kaguya, then Ai would once again be put in danger. The Nakano-Kai boss already fully intended in killing Ai, and all Yoshida would have to do is pull his protection from Ai.

Eren also already knew that Yoshida was going to manipulate Eren with this new information. Yoshida won't devote resources to protecting the people close to a freelancer, but a Lieutenant, that'll

justify allocating men and resources. So, if Eren wanted to continue having Ai protected, he'll need to go even deeper into the Yakuza.

" *Damn it.* " He said to himself.

What was he going to do? He was trapped in two impossible decisions. He despised human trafficking, but if he doesn't turn a blind eye to Kaguya's kidnapping, Ai will be in danger.

What the hell was he supposed to do?

Eren now knows, but he's unable to really do anything about it lol.

I hope you guys enjoyed this one. Especially the conclusion of Ai's fear of expressing love to her children. It is interesting from Aqua's perspective, because it's weird for him to act like a toddler since he's an adult, but he doesn't realize that Ai is so emotionally stunted that she interprets it as a lack of love.

Not going to lie though, I loved writing that part. It almost made me tear up myself lol. It was a lot of fun and I hope I met expectations that I was building up since the start.

What am I Supposed to Do?

Chapter 27: What am I Supposed to Do?

Eren finished putting in a fresh load into his washing machine and followed the steps he normally did when turning it on. After Ai showed him generally how it works, he was able to fully understand how to use it and how to clean his blood stained clothes.

Not that he fully knew where the water came from or where it was going, but that was something that confused him about Marley as well, so not a huge shock to him.

It had been a day since Aqua was discharged from the hospital and Eren needed some alone time from the happy family to think about his options. He needed to separate himself from Ai and the children so he could come up with a course of action to deal with the kidnapped Kaguya situation.

His instincts told him the same thing as before. Damn the consequences and fight. It doesn't matter how cruel the world is or what will happen after the fight. Just keep moving forward, no matter what. It's a mantra that kept him alive and fed in this new world.

But now, things were different. He got too far and too deep into the criminal element to leave now. Especially now that Ai and her children were in danger. He wondered why he should care. She's just another mother, like every other person in the world. What makes her special over other women or even people around him?

But for some reason, he can't let any harm fall to her. He had to protect her, even if he didn't fully think about why it was so important. Eren has always been driven by his emotions and instincts. So, he was aware that he didn't need a logical reason to protect Ai, only that his instincts told him that he had to.

But if he tried to save Kaguya, and ruin Yoshida's plan to use her as insurance, then at best he would pull protection away from Ai and leave her to be attacked by the Nakano-Kai. Even if Eren tried to leave the Yakuza, he'd never be able to keep Ai safe at all times, not without revealing who he is in this world.

And that was a thought that terrified him. He debated about how much he should reveal, but all he could imagine was her face contorted into fear or anger. It scared him. Scared him to imagine her looking at him in any other way that wasn't a gentle smile. He'd prefer anger or hatred from her over fear. That was the worst face he could imagine.

So, he kept it hidden from her, even though she unknowingly had people who actively want to kill her because of him. He caused this, all of this. His rash decisions are what put her life in danger and now he was paying for it.

Eren felt his pocket vibrate from his phone. He took it out and saw there was a letter from Ai.

It was a small little drawing, a moveable drawing, that showed a weird character of an animal that Eren couldn't identify. It was eating something and looked happy.

Since Eren couldn't write, Ai would send these little moving pictures instead of written letters. This particular one was asking him to come next door for breakfast.

Eren opened the panel that showed the different moving pictures and found one that would send a reply. He sent one that was skinny and sad looking, looking like it was hungry, then sent one of a character running, implying that he is hungry and will come over soon.

Ai sent back a reply, which was a character making a heart with its hands and had heart shaped eyes.

Communicating in this world was odd, though Eren found it somewhat nice. He loved sending these weird little letters to Ai through their moveable phones. It was unique, even by this world's standards, to communicate entirely through these little moving images.

Eren put his shoes on and went next door. He made sure to lock his own door and went over to Ai's door. She unlocked it for him, and with a small and gentle knock, Eren opened the door.

"Eren-San!" Ruby ran up to Eren and slammed into his leg.

Eren was surprised, unsure of why the little girl just ran over to him to hug his leg. She looked up at him and gave him a big smile, causing Eren to freeze. He didn't know what he was supposed to do.

"Uh... hi Ruby." He greeted.

"Mama say yew comed overu. Glad to see yew." She smiled even more.

"Ok, sure." he shrugged.

Ai smiled as she was getting the plates of food ready. Ruby had taken even more of a liking to Eren since he saved Ai a second time. She ran over to him and greeted him as if he was her father who came back from work. It filled Ai's heart with a sense of-

Ai shook her head, trying to stop that line of thought. Eren is not their father, he is just a guest. That's all. No way they would ever be a thing, because... because...

Well, she couldn't think of a reason, but she knew there was one. Probably work related. Yea, there had to be a work related reason.

"Comu, got yew seats." Ruby said as she grabbed Eren's hand and forced him to follow her.

" *Ruby-Chan, be polite.* " Ai said.

" *Sorry mama.* " Ruby said.

Eren sat down on the table as Ai handed out the plates. It was an American styled breakfast with eggs and bacon. She liked to add some variety and decided to try something new today.

"How is it?" Ai asked.

"Good." Eren said, using his fork to eat.

Ai bought some western eating utensils to help Eren out when he came over, since his default use for chopsticks was to simply stab it into the food. He had a lot better practice using a fork and knife over chopsticks, so it was perfect for him to use.

The little family Eren was in right now reminded him of his own. His mother who would prepare the meals, with himself and Mikasa eating at the table. It was a strange dynamic that made Eren feel odd.

Eren felt like he was both a stranger in this dynamic, and yet, a welcomed member of the family. It was strange to be in this situation. He never really sat down with a family to eat or relax with since his own was taken away the day the walls fell.

Ai was an amazing mother. She was kind, considerate, and doted on her children. It was a happy family that was almost ruined twice now.

The first time, Eren was not responsible at all. That stalker would have attacked Ai regardless of if he was there or not. So, he didn't really feel bad about that situation since he was the one to prevent it.

However, the second time Ai almost died was because of him. His reckless behavior is what put a target on her back and made a man who wanted to fight him go after her. She's a pawn who's only purpose was to emotionally manipulate Eren. Even Yoshida will use her against him.

Eren didn't really consider how his actions would affect her. For the past few years, everyone associated with Eren was either a Soldier or an enemy. Whether it was Mikasa, Armin, Jean, or even Sasha, everyone could fight and defend themselves. Especially Mikasa, though she was a different case with her Ackerman blood.

Ai though, wasn't a Soldier. She was a civilian. An innocent mother who, while physically fit from all her dancing, couldn't hope to defend herself against anyone who intended to do her harm. She had no training in fighting, no physical strength, and no experience in protecting herself. Especially since she had two four-year-old children to look after.

"Is something on your mind?" Ai asked as she realized that Eren was silent.

What can he say? He can't really be honest with her or seek her advice. She couldn't ever know the truth, but Eren needed help. He needed guidance. In this world, his instincts have done nothing but get him into more trouble.

"I guess, there's just been an issue at work lately." He said as vague as possible.

"What's wrong?" Ai asked.

Eren wondered if he should seek her advice, though he'd need to choose his words carefully. Ai had a habit of detecting when he lied, so he couldn't outright say a lie to her. She knew him too well.

"There's an issue at work where a fellow employee is doing something illegal." He said.

"Really?" Ai asked. "Did you report it to your boss?"

Ai sensed that Eren wasn't being entirely honest, but she could understand since it's a personal issue and if it's illegal, Eren would

be worried about being too honest. She did notice that he was honest, if being a little vague.

"I'm wondering how to go about it." Eren said.

"What's he doing?" Ai asked.

"He's hurting someone." Eren said vaguely.

"Like abuse?" Ai asked.

"Yea." Eren said, letting Ai come to her own conclusions. "I'm wondering if I should get involved."

"Of course, if he's doing illegal things. You should report it to your boss or the police." Ai said.

"If I do that, I'll lose my job." Eren said.

"Why?" Ai asked.

"The employee is higher in the chain than I am, so it'll be a negative stain on me." Eren said, staying vague.

"So?" Ai asked. "Won't that Russian guy help you?" Ai asked, referring to Eren's "Boss" Sergei.

"Sergei can't help me here." Eren said. "The boss of the company is over Sergei."

"I see." Ai said.

It was a huge issue. In Japan, a person's work history was everything. If you got fired from a job on bad terms, the odds of finding more work are significantly reduced. If Eren was fired, there's a chance he would struggle to find more work.

"Why not leave on your own terms?" Ai asked. "I'm sure that you can leave, find more work, and report it from the outside."

"I can't do that either." Eren said. "This is the only job I could find in this country."

Eren focused on the work aspect, since he didn't want to tell Ai about how she was in danger. It was true, Eren was worried about finding work if he left the Yakuza, but it was lower on his priorities.

"I'm sure there's other work." Ai said.

"I tried." Eren said. "No one would hire me."

"Why?" Ai asked.

"Because, I don't have any skills. Nothing that suits a normal life." Eren said.

Ai looked at him sadly. Being from a rural area with little to know access to modern technology would make it difficult for Eren to pursue a career.

"There's nothing you can do?" Ai asked.

"My only two skills are fighting and farming." Eren said. "And the farming here is completely unknown to me. I've never worked with these lands or crops. Not only that, but I've also spent so long fighting that I don't even know how to live a normal life."

Spent so long fighting? Eren was nineteen, same age as her. She knew next to nothing about Russia, but surely they recruited people, even conscripts, at eighteen.

"Didn't you do anything before you joined the Army?" Ai asked.

"I joined when I was twelve Ai." Eren said, causing her to gasp. "Before that, I spent two years working the fields of a barren landscape."

Twelve? Eren joined a military when he was twelve?

"You joined at twelve?" Ai asked.

"Yea, the Cadet Corp. We spent three years training, before we went to our first battle." He shrugged.

Three years after twelve... Eren was fifteen. Fifteen...

"Y-you were a child soldier...?" She said in complete surprise.

"Child soldier?" There was that word again.

Ai dropped her chopsticks and covered her mouth. Eren was a child soldier. He fought in a battle at the age of fifteen but trained since the age of twelve. She knew he killed people in anger, she saw it first hand with Ryosuke. She knew he had to have been on the frontlines of some kind of battlefield, but she assumed that was a year ago when he was eighteen.

But Eren fought in a war when he was a child. He saw people die and likely was nearly killed himself. He didn't even seem affected by it, like it was a normal thing that every child goes through.

"Y-your first battle..." Ai began. "D-did you have to fight?"

"Yea, I did." Eren said.

"What happened?" She asked, though remembered how insensitive the question was. "I'm sorry, you don't have to tell me if-"

"The enemy invaded us." Eren said. "We were cleaning the cannons when they did. It was sudden and quick, the same way it was five years before, when my mother died." He said.

"I see..." Ai said, allowing him to continue.

"They broke through the lines, and the 104th Cadets, that's us, were ordered to participate in the defense. It was during our graduation from training, so we were all fresh recruits. I was a part of Wagner Squad, and we were the support to the Vanguard. When we were

given the order to charge, we did, knowing that the Vanguard was wiped out."

"I don't remember most of the fighting to be honest. Things... happened." Eren closed his eyes, remembering that this was when he first learned to shift. "Most of my training class was wiped out. Very few survived the initial engagement."

"Oh my..." Ai said sadly. "How many people were in your class?" Ai asked.

"Over a hundred." Eren said.

Ai truly couldn't imagine. Ai and Eren both ironically started their careers at the same time, around twelve-years-old. She may not have lived a glamorous life, but Ai lived well when she was taken care of by President Saitou. When she turned fifteen, she started working for a movie company that would eventually lead to her meeting Hikaru and getting pregnant.

While not rich, Ai loved every moment of the past five years, between her pregnancy, the kind doctors who cared for her, and of course raising her children, Ai felt nothing but happiness and joy. Even with the downsides.

Eren never experienced that though. From day one he was a Soldier. While she was getting ready to give birth and start a new chapter in her life, he was in a trench, fighting for his life in a war he had no reason to be in. While she lived in a nice apartment, surrounded by the laughs of her children, he was cold and exposed to the elements.

All this, as a child.

"I'm so sorry Eren." Ai said, tears threatening to leak from her eyes.

"After that, I joined the Scouts." Eren said.

"What happened during your time there?" Ai asked.

"The Scouts had a high mortality rate." Eren said. "Most of my comrades in the Scouts died during the war. Only a handful, most from the 104th Corp, survived."

"You said you were conscripted by Russia before." Ai said.

"A year ago, I joined my enemy." Eren said. "I fought for their banner, fought their enemies, and posed as a member of their military."

"And you got out?" Ai asked.

"My service was up." Eren said, remembering the end of the battle of Fort Slava. "So, I was discharged, injured and nowhere to go. Most of us were."

"So, you came to Japan?" Ai asked.

"Yea." Eren said. "Sergei helped me to get situated, but there wasn't much that I could do for finding work."

It all started to make sense to Ai. Based on how she interpreted what he said, she assumed that he must have very recently left the army. Probably a few days or weeks before arriving to Japan, which means less than a month ago, Eren was in combat. He never had the chance to really rest or recover mentally from those events.

Plus, she wasn't helping him much since she keeps getting into danger and he would have to revert to that side of him to protect her. Ai felt bad and felt like she was helping to make his issues worse. She knew it was an illogical feeling, but she can't change how she feels.

But that also means that Eren hasn't had a chance to learn a new skill in order to work outside of the army. He was completely stuck doing whatever his current bosses wanted since he has no other option. And if he gets on the wrong side of his current company and get fired, most companies in Japan won't take him since that would be a black mark on his career.

Ai could see that Eren was a good person. He wasn't a monster or criminal, so he was greatly affected by seeing this injustice by his coworker but doesn't want to lose what little life he has built so far.

"So, I don't know what I should do." He looked down, his eyebrows furrowed and contemplating his next choice.

"I think you should do the right thing." Ai said with a naive smile.

"Really?" Eren asked.

"Yea." She said. "I think you're a really good person Eren."

"I don't know..." Eren trailed off.

"But you are." Ai said. "You are kind, considerate, and you've saved me two times now. You've helped me when Aqua went missing, comforted me when I felt scared, and even indulged Ruby-Chan when she wanted to play."

Ruby looked at Ai when she heard her name, unable to follow the conversation with how fast they were talking.

"I don't know if I am a good person." Eren said.

"I think you are." Ai said with a warm and gentle smile. "I understand Soldiers can have difficult experiences. But it was something forced on you. And I know you killed, but you only ever killed bad people or people who wanted to hurt you. You never hurt anyone innocent because you're a good person."

How naive of her. She still thought Eren was a good person. She was right in that Eren's hand was forced into doing what he did. It may have been a choice that resulted in more blood, but Eren had no choice in what he did. The Rumbling had to happen, or else his home and his friends would die.

That doesn't change the fact that Eren was a monster. Quite possibly the worse kind of human trash to ever exist. If Ai even learned a

fraction of what he did, she'd have a very different thing to say about that.

"So, I think you should do something. Even if something bad does happen. Because I don't think you should compromise who you are." She continued.

"Who I am Ai, is someone who pushed forwards and doesn't care for consequences. I got myself in this mess, made choice that led to this, and did stupid things." He said.

"I think we all do stupid things." Ai said. "And we sometimes don't think about our consequences. But I think that instead of running from our consequences or ignoring it, we should face it when we do the right thing. Because I believe that we should all strive to do the right thing and set an example for our children. Even if the consequences are hard."

"Really?" Eren thought to himself.

"The people who know my situation always ask me, why do I stay as an idol when I have children. I always tell people that I like being an idol, which is partially true. But the main reason, is that when my children are older, I want them to pursue what they want no matter how hard it is. I want them to look on my past and see that no matter how hard, or how dangerous the consequences are, I never gave up my dream of being a famous idol. Because I believe we should accept the consequences and do what's right to leave a good example for our children."

Eren wondered if her opinion would change if she knew the real consequences of what he knew he should do, that being that Ai and her children would be in danger if he chose to save Kaguya.

Still, he couldn't deny that she was passionate about that belief. No matter what, his choice was the same thing, even in this world. No matter what happens, someone innocent will get hurt. The only

difference is that this is a dilemma that he caused because of his rash actions.

Eren looked at Ai's smiling face and knew that if she ever learned that he chose not to save Kaguya, she'd look at him with anger and hatred. She'd hate him for not saving an innocent girl.

Eren knew what he needed to do. He knew that he needed to save Kaguya, even if at great risk to himself and Ai. He's already made this mistake, but he wondered if he should just follow her naive advice. Doing the right thing and accepting the consequences.

For Eren though, accepting the consequences would mean protecting Ai from the fallout. He knew he could, and he dared Yoshida to try to lay a hand on her. He'd kill Yoshida if he ever even thought of touching Ai or her children. He dared the bastard.

So, he'd move forward, knowing the consequences, and prepared to accept them when the time came. If he had to bring the entire Yakuza down to protect her, he would.

No more half baked plans. No more running into combat without a plan. He'd consider every option and only act when he was sure he had a plan. No more emotional outbursts. Eren had to change. He had to be different. He had to be better, for no other reason than to keep Ai safe.

Eren walked up to the street corner where Sergei was waiting for him. Eren called Sergei to give him a ride since Yoshida wanted to speak with him. He needed to figure out his current situation. Eren ignored Sergei's warning up till now, and now he's getting completely overwhelmed.

"I warned you about being reckless and going too deep." Sergei said as Eren got into the car.

"I'm not in the mood for it Sergei." Eren said.

"So, what do you need?" He asked as he drove away.

"Before you take me to Yoshida, I need some help." He said.

"Sure, I'll help you." He said. "Honestly, being the man who got Akuma No Ko into the scene is going very well for my businesses, so I'll help you out for free. Think of it as your reward."

"I need to find the Shinomiya girl." He said.

"The girl that was kidnapped?" Sergei asked.

"Yes, Yoshida took her." Eren said.

"So? Doesn't he pay your bills and provide protection for single mom?" He asked.

"You don't see an issue with a teenage girl being put in human trafficking?" Eren asked.

"If I cared about every girl as trafficked, I'd either be dead or poor." Sergei said. "The thing you have to learn is when you turn a blind eye and when to stay low. If you do this, how long until Yoshida decides to recuperate the money and resources by kidnapping and selling Ai?"

"I won't let him." Eren said.

"Have you learned nothing?" Sergei asked. "You're in this position because you decide to go your own way while damning the consequences. Not realizing that you're not the only one who pays. Do you think Yoshida won't sell the kids as well?"

"So, I do nothing and let Kaguya suffer?" Eren asked.

"There are starving orphans and kidnapped people all over the place." Sergei said. "You think you're going to save everyone who Yoshida traffics? How about some of the girls at the red light district?"

Do you know a lot of them are forced or compelled to sell their bodies? Do you intend to save every girl he has?"

Eren gritted his teeth, unsure of what to say. Sergei had a point. Eren knew full well the kind of men Yoshida and the people he employs were. He already turned a blind eye to human trafficking, what's one more time. It's not like he even knew Kaguya.

"I refuse to leave the girl." Eren said.

Despite what's happened here and the past four years, Eren has never fundamentally changed. He's the same person he's been since the day he saved Mikasa from those kidnappers in the cabin. Keep moving forward and damn the consequences.

"Damn kid." Sergei shook his head. "I won't be labeled responsible for what happens."

"Yoshida won't be able to tie it to me." Eren said.

"You're planning to sneak in? Is that big plan?" Sergei asked.

"In a way, sure." Eren said. "Once I find out where she is."

"Oh, and how do you plan to do that?" Sergei asked. "Talk to the guards with your fluent Japanese, blend in with your round eyes and western face? Maybe, you can just lie and say you're transporting her."

"I'll find a way to get in unnoticed." Eren said.

"That is terrible idea." Sergei said. "If you're discovered, even if you die, he might sell Ai and children just as revenge against you. Even beyond the grave. And do you think that police will care about a missing idol when Shinomiya girl is missing?"

"I'm doing this Sergei, what I need from you is information on where Kaguya is." Eren said.

"Right, because Sergei is a fucking rat, right?" Sergei asked. "If I go rat on clients, I lose business."

"I won't get discovered." Eren said.

"Do what you will kid." Sergei said. "You've ignored everything I've said until now, so might as well do it again."

"I won't be reckless this time." Eren said. "I need a plan on how I'm going to do it. And I know you are better than me when it comes to how these organizations work. So, I need help."

"What do you intend?" Sergei asked.

"Right now, Yoshida intends to keep Kaguya until after the Ginza attack." Eren said. "However, I know that the Nakano-Kai will survive."

"How will they possibly survive?" Sergei asked. "After what you said about bosses last words, they are expecting Yoshida. But there's nothing they can do. The Nakano-Kai barely numbers in the low hundreds and only half of them are in Tokyo. Yoshida has thousands under his pay. There's no way they can win, even if they know the attack is coming."

"They're a cornered animal Sergei, nothing is more dangerous." Eren went against much greater odds before. "For now, we'll play it safe. We'll only act to save Kaguya if the Nakano-Kai are not defeated at Ginza, since Yoshida will keep her. Until then, we plan and figure out where she is and how to save her."

"We, again?" Sergei asked.

"Yes, we." Eren retorted. "You're in this too Sergei."

"What makes you think I'll risk business?" Sergei asked.

"Because you're going to help me or watch me die. Which considering how much good business I bring in, is worth a little under

the table deals." Eren smiled.

"You have point." Sergei snickered. "Seems I taught you well enough. Fine, I'll help but I won't get involved. Actual rescue is you and you alone."

"I already have someone I know can help." Eren said.

"If he's Yakuza, no chance. No one will cross Yoshida." Sergei said.

"He's not Yakuza, actually he's someone I met who's close to Kaguya." Eren said.

"Who?" Sergei asked.

"Ai talked about a boy, Miyuki, who is in love with Kaguya." Eren said. "Not only can he sneak in and open doors, literally, but he can act as an informant where I can't."

"He has motivation, but how do you know this could work?" Eren said. "If he's inlove, I'd assume he's some rich kid."

"A kid who's at the best place of learning in the country. He's smart and resourceful, since apparently he's actually poor and got in because of his intelligence." Eren said, remembering what Ai told him.

"How do you intend to convince him to help and not rat you to police." Sergei asked.

"No clue." Eren said. "But that's one of the things I need you for Sergei. I need you to figure out how to convince him. I don't know nearly enough about this country to come up with a good enough lie or threat. So, you'll handle that. Plus, I need you to get an audience with him."

"We're saving a girl by kidnapping a boy?" Sergei asked.

"That's the bare bones so far, but we'll have a plan that we can execute if Yoshida keeps her after Ginza." Eren said.

"You do know you run the risk of someone who speaks with Ai learning you're the Akuma No Ko, right?" Sergei asked.

"I know the risk Sergei." Eren said. "And if that's the consequence for this, I'll accept it."

"At least you're being less dumb." Sergei said. "Ok, we'll work towards that. But I only provide plan and resources. I refuse to be caught helping you."

"It's all I need Sergei." Eren said.

Eren felt... better. He felt like there was a weight off his chest and that he was doing something good for a change. He knew the risk, but he wasn't going to let some innocent girl suffer. Eren was tired of letting innocent people suffer. He was tired of being a devil to people.

For once in his life, Eren would like to not be feared as a devil.

Now we finally get some character development for Eren. It is what I would consider a natural progression of his character. Almost a regression in a way, since AoT made him become very much a villain and this is going back to him wanting to be better. Plus, Ai had an effect on him as well.

At least he's actually planning now, instead of going in guns blazing lol. Even in Season 4 he'd go in like a man without a plan lol.

Plus, Ai understands him a little more and who he is, even if it's only mostly true. I wonder how she'll react when (Yea, not if) she finds out that he's working for the mob lol.

BTW, finished the John Wick series. Loved it lol.

Anyway, hope you guys enjoyed.

I am Quitting B-Komachi

Chapter 28: I am Quitting B-Komachi

Ai stretched her arms as she got out of her Futon. Her body was still slightly sore after the concert, but thankfully her bruise was mostly gone. There was only a small purple mark on it from the attack.

She got up carefully since Ruby was still asleep, though it proved in vain as her daughter shifted and started to wake up. She gripped onto Ai's arms, preventing her from removing them. Ai smiled at the show of affection.

"Good morning baby." Ai smiled down at her daughter, who was trying to rub the sleep from her eyes.

"Morning mama." Ruby said in a tired voice.

"I love you." Ai said, feeling giddy at being able to finally say those words out loud whenever she wanted.

"Love you too." She said, not putting much emotion into it since it was so natural for her to say.

"Come on, we need to get ready for the celebration." Ai said.

"Wasn't it canceled?" ruby asked.

Normally, they would celebrate the night of or the day after the concert. Of course, since the concert went poorly due to the Yakuza attack, they pushed it by a few days.

They decided that they would go to Meimei's husband's restaurant on the Ginza strip, since he normally opened his door early for B-Komachi. He did this so they'd be the only ones there and personally cook for them, that way they can avoid being spotted.

"Nope, we still need to celebrate a job well done." Ai smiled.

True, it went poorly, but her fame completely skyrocketed thanks to her protecting Aqua, which no one realized was her son. She didn't like the idea of her son being on the news so much, but at least he was safe.

"Will Eren-San be there?" She asked.

"Eren-San has work today, so he'll miss it. Besides, you know how the President is with boys being there." She laughed.

"Then we should leave Aqua too." Ruby said, hoping to get more alone time with Ai.

"But won't he be hungry?" Ai asked.

"We have instant noodles here." Ruby said greedily.

"Nope, he's coming too." She giggled. "Come on, let's get your brother. He's probably awake by now."

Aqua was normally up earlier than her since the Ryosuke attack, so she was a bit worried that he was getting paranoid. Miyako said it was normal and should go away after a little while, though she was worried that he wasn't getting much sleep.

"Aqua-Chan, what are you doing?" She asked as she stepped into the main room.

Aqua quickly changed the channel when she walked in, no doubt watching the news again. Seriously, why was he so interested? She worried that one day, when he was a teenager, she might accidentally walk into him watching pornographic stuff, but she didn't expect to have to worry about his watching habits at four.

Was this normal with having a boy?

"Watching, eto- a- crap..." He put a hand on his face out of embarrassment.

He was watching the news; she could hear it when she walked in. But, in his haste to change it, he switched to a western R rated movie that was currently playing a sex scene. It wasn't too graphic, but surely much more graphic than a four-year-old should be watching.

Aqua just shut the TV off, his face red from the embarrassment.

"It was the news originally." He said, preferring dealing with that instead of watching a sex scene by mistake.

"I know, and you have lost TV privileges." Ai said, taking the remote from him.

He sighed at the situation and just decided to let her have this one. He tried to switch to a kid friendly anime but hit the wrong button.

"I'm going to buy a smart TV and make sure I can restrict certain channels." Ai said with a sigh.

"Sorry Ai." He said.

"You're forgiven, but still need to be punished." She giggled.

Aqua got up and walked over to Ai. He gently hugged her leg with one arm, careful not to put any pressure on his arm that was currently in the sling. He held her for a moment, causing Ai to gasp in surprise.

"I love you, Ai." He said, before letting go of her leg and walking back to the couch.

Aqua never was fully aware of how emotionally stunted Ai was due to her childhood. He never realized that she believed, even for a moment, that he didn't care about her. So, even if it was

embarrassing, he resolved to show her more affection so that there was no doubt that he did care greatly for her.

"Come here!" Ai yelled happily as she gently wrapped her arms around him from behind.

"Ai, careful!" He said, trying to avoid her touching his injured arm.

"I love you too baby!" She exclaimed happily.

"I know, now please let go!" He said, though luckily there was no pain in his arm.

He promised himself he'd show more affection, but there was a limit right now. Baby steps.

"Let's get ready!" She said, running to get changed.

She really had to be careful. His arm still hurt, and they needed to be careful. She could cause more damage if she wasn't gentle with him, though her over affectionate nature did tend to make that difficult. A few times she'd hold or kiss him in a way that she'd put pressure on his arm, causing her to apologize and overreact about causing more damage.

She really was hopeless sometimes.

After a few moments, the family was fully changed, and Ai was in her disguise. Miyako was almost there so she was helping the kids put their shoes on.

"Ai, can you help." Aqua said.

"Of course!" She said.

"Mama! Me first!" Ruby said, jealous of the attention.

"One moment Ruby-Chan, your brother is hurt." She said.

Ruby pouted but understood that she was right. Aqua did need extra care and help.

Except he didn't and could manage just fine with one arm. He only asked her for help since she loved caring for her children, and he let her indulge that side of her motherly duties.

"Are you ok Aqua-Chan?" She asked.

"Yea, why?" Aqua asked.

"Are you in pain?" She said.

Yes, he was. Without the pain medication, his arm would sometimes flare up in a dull and pulsing pain. It didn't restrict him, outside of not being able to use his arm, but it was a constant annoyance.

"Let me get the medicine." Ai said.

"No, I am fine Ai." Aqua lied. "There's no pain."

Ai could see through his lie, but she wondered why he didn't take the medication. It was there to help him. Was this another moment of his stupid manly act? Where he wanted to endure pain because he thought it would be manly? Is this just a dumb boy thing that he and Eren shared?

"The medicine helps you sweetie." She said.

"I know, but I'm fine. Really." He insisted.

Aqua was fully aware of the kind of medication the doctors gave him. It was relatively mild pain killers, especially for his age, but he didn't want to take it. Aqua wasn't sure how this young body and adult brain mix would interact with the medication. He was worried that he'd get an addiction from it, even if he followed the recommended dose the doctor gave him.

Addictions were often times as mental as they were physical, and he didn't know how he would react to any addictive substance. He even felt a bit of an alcohol withdraw when he was first born. While he never drank much, he did enjoy the occasional nighttime beer, an addiction that it seems was more mental than physical.

He tried a few times to get some beer, but Ai immediately stopped that and refused to keep beer in the room. While in no way was he addicted, he did miss the taste of a lone beer after a hard day's work.

Ai reluctantly let him go. After all, even if he was trying to be manly, he was still a child. If he could handle it without crying, it must be very minor. No child could handle a high threshold of pain, so she let it go.

Miyako pulled up to the door and Ai got out to put the kids in the car. She said a greeting to Miyako and got into the backseat with her children.

Miyako drove away towards the location in Ginza in order to enjoy a good celebration, especially after what happened with the attack at the concert.

Meimei's husband was a very wealthy and successful man, owning one of the best locations on the Ginza Strip and one of the most popular restaurants. Meimei always intended to leave B-Komachi after they got married, but Ai assumed she stayed so as to ensure that B-Komachi would remain famous without her.

As the best dancer in the group, she was the second most popular idol besides Ai. This is why it would be a huge shock that she was not only married, but married to a man who was eleven years older than her.

"Over here Ai." She waved at Ai from her table.

Of course, since it was early, they were the only ones there. The rest of the girls were there, along with the President who was at the head of the table. Ever the workaholic, President Saitou was going over the recent deals and sponsorships that they were receiving.

"Hello Meimei, how's Yuto doing?" Ai asked.

"He's in the kitchen now, getting everything ready." She smiled. "He recommends the lobster for today since they just got a fresh batch in."

"I can't wait, it sounds delicious." Ai laughed, excited to have some more exotic foods.

The restaurant had a very classical Japanese look to it. There was a large number of traditional decorations and older styled weapons and swords mounted to the walls. Old mockups of oil paintings and statues showed depictions of landscapes and historical figures in classic Japanese styles.

Yuto prided himself on collecting authentically made ancient weapons that were displayed all over the place. Everything ranging from Katana's, to Kanabo's were hanging on the walls. He said he spent a lot of money to make sure they were purchased from authentic Japanese smiths and added to the authenticity of the restaurant.

It was a very popular place for westerners who really loved the older style of decorations. Yuto was always a big fan of Japanese history, so he loved to collect authentic replicas for display, though he was never wealthy enough to get actual authentic pieces.

"How's Eren-San doing?" Meimei asked.

"He's working right now." Ai said. "That Russian boss of his picked him up."

"Hopefully he won't get into any more accidents or fights." Meimei giggled.

"Yea, you saw how he fought on the stage, right?" Nino asked.

"Yea Nino, we were all there." Ari said.

"It terrified me, I thought he was going to die-"

"Seriously, maybe don't say that in front of Ai!" Meimei chastised her.

"Right, sorry." Nino said.

"It's ok." Ai waved her off. "It was scary."

"Do you think he learned that in the Russian Army?" Nino asked.

"I thought American Soldiers were scary." Kyun said.

"Yea, but I never saw a fight like that." Watanabe said. "Minus the one time my older brother and I watched a UFC fight."

"It's such a romantic thing." Nino sighed.

"I don't see how it is..." Ai said under her breath.

What was with some of these girls and saying that life and death situations are romantic? As much as Ai is grateful to Eren saving her life, she honestly does not find the idea of him sacrificing his life for her romantic in the slightest.

"Think about it, your very own protector. Like a Samurai defending his maiden." Nino said.

"Except Samurai served Shoguns, not protecting maidens." Meimei said.

"Don't get all historical on me." Nino countered.

"It's honestly not romantic to me." Ai said.

"Why not?" Nino asked.

"Because we almost died." Ai said. "I don't much like the idea of a guy I like being covered in blood after a fight. I don't even like violence of any kind."

"She said it!" Takamine jumped into the conversation.

"Said what?" Ai asked.

"Guy you like." Meimei smiled. "So, you're finally admitting you like him?"

"It's not like that!" Ai tried to deflect the conversation.

"Yea, mama does like him." Ruby chose now to say something.

"I don't!" Ruby you little snitch! Ai would have thrown her out a window if she wasn't so adorable.

"So, when's the first date?" Ari asked.

"Never!" Ai said. "Besides, I don't know if he likes me."

"He literally fought a Yakuza gang member in order to protect you, of course he likes you." Meimei said.

"We were all in danger." Ai tried to explain.

"Seriously Ai, stop being a scared little schoolgirl and just admit that you like him." Meimei said.

Ai blushed and refused to say anything. She knew that deep down, she really did like Eren. But she had to deny it no matter what.

After all, what if he didn't like her? She was terrified of the thought of asking him out on a date because of how scared she was of

rejection. She didn't want to imagine the possibility of dating because of her complete lack of options if he did reject her. She was too terrified to admit it to herself because she'd once again lose hope in romance if she was rejected.

"I'm telling you Ai; he does like you." Meimei tried to say.

"But, what if you're wrong?" Ai said nervously.

"I know men." Meimei said. "Plus, you have to put yourself out there. You have to show some kind of interest, or he'll never try to pursue you. Believe me, I had such a hard time getting Yuto to date me since he felt so uncomfortable with me being eighteen when we met."

"But I don't know how to do that." Ai said. "Hikaru pursued me right from the start. It was so easy when he did all the work. But Eren doesn't pursue me at all, and I don't know what I should do or say. I've never had to pursue anyone."

"It's not complicated Ai." Meimei said. "All you have to do is admit your feelings and tell him you want to date. It's easy. There's no trick or special move you have to do."

"Yea mama." Ruby said. "Besides, Eren-San is already living with us."

Suddenly, all the girls choked minus Meimei. Even President Saitou had to take a double take.

"What!?" Saitou yelled.

Busted... Ruby is going to go flying out the window when Ai gets the chance.

"So scandalous." Ari said as she put her hands to her mouth.

"Sweet innocent Ai is living with a man." Nino said.

"Think of the controversy." Watanabe said.

"A maiden who has fallen from purity." What was Takamine even talking about?

"You girls do realize that I have children, so my purity and maidenhood no longer exist." Ai crossed her arms in annoyance.

"Ai, did you two-" Saitou began.

"No!" Ai said, her face red with embarrassment.

"Seriously Ichigo?" Miyako asked. "She can't even get the guy on a date, so you think she'd sleep with him?"

"It's not that!" He said.

"President is just worried you'll get pregnant again." Ari laughed.

"That's far from my mind." He defended.

"Right." She giggled.

"Listen Ai, next time we see Eren, we'll help you get a proper date." Meimei said.

"Do you really think he'd like to?" She asked, still nervous of the idea of rejection.

"Yea, he would." She reassured her friend. "I'll teach you to use the same tricks that I used on Yuto." She giggled.

"Please no fetish cosplay." Ai begged.

"I only recommend that for foreigners, not Japanese men." She giggled. "Though it is a great idea for him."

"Conversation done girls." Saitou said, not wanting to hear his idols go into this line of conversation.

"Sorry boss." Meimei giggled. "Though it could give you a few ideas with Miyak-"

"The scouts loved the first two songs." He began, cutting Meimei off.

"That's rude." She said, crossing her arms and leaning back into her chair.

"They are open to us reserving the Tokyo Dome for the beginning of Summer in the next few months." He said.

"That's awesome!" Meimei said.

"Yea, we can finally get the Dome!" Ari agreed.

"Our careers will skyrocket after that!" Nino yelled.

"They're still waiting for my reply on whether or not we want to reserve it." He said.

"Well, what are you waiting for?" Watanabe asked. "Tell them we're interested."

"Well, that's the thing. I might tell them that we're not interested." He broke the news.

There was a long silence, none of the women expected those words to leave his mouth. For years, their main goal was reaching the Tokyo Dome, and now it was well within their grasp.

"What?" Miyako asked.

"Yea, seriously." Meimei asked. "Why not?"

"I'm thinking about speaking with Strawberry Productions about dissolving B-Komachi." He said with a sad look.

"Ichigo, what the hell!?" Miyako stood up.

"Yea President, why are you thinking of getting rid of B-Komachi!?" Meimei yelled.

He looked down at the table, knowing that this was the reaction his idols were going to have on the news. Each girl, minus Meimei, needed the Tokyo Dome to launch their careers and become famous idols. Even if they decided to go solo, the Tokyo Dome would ensure that they would have very good paying jobs after they graduated B-Komachi.

But-

"I can't do it anymore." He said.

"Why?" Ari asked.

"I almost lost one of you girls this weekend." He said sadly. "I almost lost Ai to a crazed stalker a few weeks ago. That's twice now that one of my idols almost died because of being idols. And I don't know if I want to continue having you girls at risk if it puts your lives in danger."

"But that's stupid!" Nino said. "It was one bad event, and Ai was fine!"

"And what if next time, she isn't fine?" He asked, cutting her off.

"Well-" Nino tried to say.

"If any one of you girls got hurt or died, that would be entirely on me." He said. "I am your manager, your boss. I should have increased security or fought with Strawberry Productions for funding to get private security. I can't even place you girls in protected custody after that event because the police are too busy trying to find the Shinomiya's daughter."

"I can't handle the thought of one of you girls dying because of some stalker or organized crime. I can't let you girls die because of my lack

of ability to do something. So, I figure the best way to protect you girls is to quit B-Komachi and make sure you girls do something that won't get you killed."

There was a sad silence in the room. Saitou was too broken up with almost losing Ai twice. Though he'd never admit it, he cared for Ai more than the other girls. It's not even a stretch to say that he loved her, much in the same way a father loved a daughter.

He practically raised her. He taught her how to create a persona. How to lie on stage and in interviews. He taught her how to dance and made sure she had the best instructors that Strawberry Productions could afford.

And now, he had to live with the thought that she almost died twice because he couldn't get any form of protection. And the worse thing was, she was saved both times by a man he considered suspicious and potentially violent.

As much as he was grateful to Eren for saving Ai, he was worried if Eren was potentially abusive. If he was, there would be nothing to stop him from physically or mentally abusing Ai. Maybe he was unfair, and he knew that. But Ai was basically his daughter, he had to keep her safe and healthy.

"Ichigo, what about our dream?" Miyako asked. "Our dream to fill the Dome up with glowsticks? To stand there as our idols danced on stage to the roar of thousands?"

"I'm sorry Miyako-Chan." He said. "It's not worth the girls' lives."

Miyako understood, as hard as it was for her to say. She saw Ai as almost as a little sister, but also saw Ai's children as her own. She looked over to Aqua, who's arm was still in the sling. Her heart shattered when she saw the video of him being stabbed.

Miyako had no doubt that if anything happened to Ai, she would gladly care for the children as her own. They were too precious to

her.

"Please forgive me, but I can't handle a third time." He said. "We might not get so lucky a third time."

"I think it is a bit unfair President." Ai finally spoke up.

"What?" He asked.

"I understood how dangerous it is to be an idol, and I accepted that. We all did." She pointed to the girls. "But this isn't just your decision. It's ours as well. We put in just as much work into this as you have. We put ourselves at risk because it's what we love to do."

"You were the one who told me that lying can be a form of love in itself. And I can tell you that I love this job. I enjoy giving people love and receiving it from them. Even if it is a fake idol persona. I love how our music inspires people and makes them happy. It is something I don't want to give up because I am scared."

"I think all of us agree that we can do this. We may be in danger, but I don't want to give up the thing I love because of how scared I am or how dangerous it can be. I want to show my children that even when it is dangerous, we must never give up on the things we love because we're scared of what can happen."

"So, I want us to continue. I want to get to the Tokyo Dome and make your dreams come true. So please, give us that chance and don't take the decision away from us."

Saitou saw her using her idol persona. That cute, innocent, and pure maiden like aura radiated off of her. He couldn't help but feel comforted by her aura. It was so kind, genuine, and beautiful. However, he could always tell when she was lying, he was the one who taught her after all.

However, this was different. Ai wasn't lying, she was being sincere. She was using her idol act on him, but her words were no less

genuine than anything else. She truly believed what she was saying and wanted to keep on going, even if it was dangerous.

"I don't want to." He sighed.

"Please President Saitou." Ai begged. "Please don't take our choice away from us."

Now that he looked at her, this wasn't entirely her idol act, though it was similar. This was the same act a daughter would use on her father when she wanted something. Is this what a puppy dog face looks like?

"We'll give it one more try." He relented. "But I will not let this happen a third time."

The girls cheered at the news, glad that Ai was able to convince him to keep on going.

"Don't ever do that again." Miyako said, breathing a sigh of relief.

"I'm sorry." Saitou said.

"I understand Ichigo." She said. "I can understand that you're trying to protect them, but these girls aren't yours. They aren't even girls anymore. They're full grown women and you need to start treating them like that."

"Stop making me sound old Miyako-Chan." He said with a sigh, realizing that Ai and Miyako were both right.

Ai smiled at how the couple talked with each other. She was glad that they could help put President Saitou's worries to rest. He's a good man, but sometimes a bit overprotective.

"Now, here's how we're going to get Eren." Meimei said.

They're switching back to that topic!?

"Eren, sit down." Yoshida said as Eren walked into the room, followed by Sergei. "We have much to discuss."

Eren sat down. He was in a large spa of some kind, in the relaxing area for VIPs. There was a nice set of couches and tables in the center of the room with tea and snacks for guests. The overall decoration of the area had a very oriental feel to it, with gold statues of dragons and tigers.

"Sure." Eren said, sitting down.

Yoshida was dressed in a very expensive looking dress robe, sitting on the couch and currently getting a massage from a beautiful woman in a, what did the Azumabito call it? A kimono, or a Yakata? He didn't know, but it was simple and likely picked to be easy to remove.

"War can be bad for the soul and body, you need rest after a fight." Yoshida said. "Don't you agree Sergei?" He asked.

"Of course." Sergei agreed. "The warmth of a woman is important after a fight."

"How about you enjoy yourself Eren." Yoshida said, motioning for a few young and beautiful girls, around Eren's age, to walk up to him with their heads bowed in respect.

"Not interested." Eren said, waving off the women.

The women turned to Yoshida, unable to understand English and looking to him for clarification. Yoshida said something in Japanese, and the girls left Eren alone.

"If he wasn't with Ai, I'd assume he wasn't into women." Yoshida laughed.

"Eren is still young." Sergei laughed. "Give him time to learn a womans warmth."

"This generation is different, he should be more versed in woman than in our day Sergei." He said, amused by the situation.

"I don't normally mix work and pleasure." Eren said.

"You worried about Ai? She'll never know. Besides, if she did learn, she'd leave you for more than just a little fun." Yoshida taunted.

"I don't care for you poking fun at me." Eren said. "Say what you want and let's be done with this."

"A man of action then, I can respect that." Yoshida said. "We need to consider what to do now that we know that the Nakano-Kai are expecting our attack. The rat must have fed them information."

"He knows we're planning to strike at a restaurant." Eren said.

"We're aware." Yoshida said.

"So, what's my new role going to be?" Eren asked.

"Nothing will change." Yoshida said.

"Really, considering the Ginza attack will probably be a trap." Eren said.

"Even if it is, so what?" Yoshida asked. "I have one thousand men taking to the streets that day. He'll have maybe a hundred, maybe two. He will have no possible chance in winning against us, even if they know."

"What makes you sure their leadership will be there?" Eren asked.

"I know his leadership won't, but he will. You piqued his interest."

"Who is he exactly?" Eren asked, hoping to learn more about this enemy.

Eren didn't care much at first on who he was, since to him, he was just another guy. But after recent events, Eren realized that this man was much more dangerous than he originally thought.

"There are much I won't say, but in the past few years he earned the name Jigoku No Mao in Osaka."

"Ji-what?" Eren asked.

"It roughly translates to the Demon King of Hell." Yoshida said. "He was a poor child who grew up on the streets in Tokyo. His mother was a prostitute in the red light district, so you can imagine how upset he was. Mao originally joined my group when he was a teenager, but decided to branch out and he founded his own group. Since then, Mao has intended to move back into Tokyo."

"So, he was one of your men?" Eren asked.

"Yes, years ago. But he's changed. He was probably one of my best enforcers at the time. He would bet on himself in fights and always won. However, he was violent and often times difficult to control. He always jumped at the hardest jobs because of the thrill it gave him."

"So, he's only interested in this war for the thrill?" Eren asked.

"I have no doubt that Mao is simply wanting to fight for the sake of fighting. This little war will be over soon, since he has no grand designs outside of a good fight. He'll simply be killed, along with his men, and that will be the end of it." Yoshida explained.

"I don't think it will be so simple." Eren said.

"You are a Soldier, not a criminal yet. Things work differently here." Yoshida claimed, yet Eren doubted that.

"Believe what you want Yoshida." Eren said.

"There is one last thing we need to discuss, specifically about Ai." Yoshida began.

"Go ahead." Eren said with narrowed eyes, knowing what Yoshida was going to say.

"The attack at the concert brought some dilemmas to my attention, such as where I need to allocate resourc-"

"Let me cut in." Eren said.

"Oh?" Yoshida raised his eyebrow, more interested than offended. "By all means."

"I'm not stupid." Eren said. "You're going to use Ai to manipulate me. Despite your thousands of followers, apparently protecting one girl will be too much to protect her and fight a war. Is that what your dilemma is?"

"Yes, that is what I was going to say." He laughed.

"Despite all those resources that apparently can't handle a few hundred guys." Eren mocked. "You can't use resources to protect someone close to a freelancer but will gladly use them to protect a Lieutenant. So, if I want to continue protecting Ai, you want me to take the promotion and officially become a member of your gang."

"Ah Sergei." Yoshida laughed. "I knew the boy was smart. A disrespectful child, but he'll grow."

"So?" Eren asked.

"I guess I won't try to lie and be honest." Yoshida said. "Yes, Ai is going to be used against you. If I'm going to use resources to protect yours, you better use your skills to help me. And if you fail me or don't take promotions, all I have to do is pull protection away from her."

"I'm aware." Eren glared. "But don't forget Yoshida. If anything happens to her, nothing will be there to stop me from killing you."

Yoshida's cheerful persona switched to a more threatening one. He made a movement with his hand and another woman came out with a small plate with a teacup on it. She kneeled in front of Yoshida and presented it to him, which he took and sipped from it.

"Normally, if one of my men threatened me, I would take their finger as a punishment." Yoshida said. "Understand, that the only reason I'm allowing your disrespect is because you are more useful to me healthy than injured. But do not push me boy. Do not make me have to give discipline to you. I'll forgive your insults, but I will not tolerate a threat."

"And I won't tolerate Ai being used against me." Eren said. "As long as you don't push against me, I won't push against you Yoshida." Eren lied, knowing he was about to rescue Kaguya.

"Don't presume to know what I am and am not willing to do Eren." Yoshida said.

"And don't presume the same." Eren leaned forward. "You think your little group frightens me? I fought against nations Yoshida. I fought against monsters you couldn't possibly imagine. I participated in a coup and lead one myself. I brought nations to its knees and earned the title of the Devil of Paradis. The mountain of corpses that are behind me are larger than you could imagine. So, don't you dare give me a reason to show you who I was."

Yoshida knew Eren was lying. He had to be. No one, especially a kid, could accomplish so much. He wasn't aware of any actual changes in governments recently, not unless you talk about Egypt a few years ago, but there was no way Eren was being honest here.

However, the conviction and threatening tone he used sent a shiver of fear through Yoshida's spine. As if, even if logically, it was impossible for him to be telling the truth, the emotion he delivered was real. Eren was either a very convincing liar, or a very intimidating child.

Without waiting, Eren stood up and walked away, ignoring the shocked look from Yoshida. He turned and went out the door, Sergei following as he did so.

Eren was lucky none of his men were in the room, otherwise he'd be forced to show Eren some kind of discipline... though why didn't he show it now on principle?

And another one down, this one setting up the Ginza attack a bit more as well as a bit of development for Saito.

Hope you guys enjoyed, please let me know how it is.

Ruby Teaches Eren to Dance

Chapter 29: Ruby Teaches Eren to Dance

Aqua stayed in the restroom while Ai was getting ready for bed. He had to contact Kuro since they agreed that he would be the only one to call her since she couldn't reach him. Not only did Aqua not have a phone, but he didn't want to risk Ai finding out about Kuro.

After all, could anyone imagine how Ai would react if she found out that a thirty-year-old degenerate woman was consistently talking to her four-year-old son? Even in context it could still look bad. So, he had to be the one to contact her and delete their conversation history in Ai's phone.

Texting with one hand was difficult for him. Since his hands are so small, Aqua had to lay the phone down on the floor to easily reach all the buttons in order to type Kuro's phone number. This injury made things difficult.

"Kuro?" He asked as she picked up.

"Aqua darling, how are you?" She asked happily.

"I could be better." He said, moving his injured arm a bit.

"I saw the whole incident. You weren't kidding when you said Eren was dangerous." She said.

"Yea, honestly I'm feeling better about him now after he risked his life to save Ai like that." He said. "But I still need to know more about him."

"I also saw your little heroic moment; did you get a reward?" She asked suggestively.

"I'm not dignifying that." He said.

"It seems you care more for her than as a son. Tell me, if you did get older-"

"No." Aqua said. "No, no, no, and a thousand times no. Life isn't one of your stupid hentai manga or doujinshi. She is my mother now and Ruby is my sister. So not in a million years would I ever consider doing anything with them."

"I didn't say anything about Ruby." She giggled.

"I know you were thinking it." He said.

"But mentally, she is not your sister. Right?" Kuro said. "What if one day, when you're older, you fall in love? After all, she's not technically your sister."

"Only someone obsessed with pornography could possibly come to that conclusion." He said in annoyance. "Regardless of the fact that we're both reborn, we are still siblings. So, whatever depraved thoughts you have, please keep them to yourself."

"You're no fun." She said.

"It's a wonder no one would ever date you." He said.

"Actually, I'm married." She said.

"..."

Aqua had no words. There was no way this freak of nature was married. She was way to insane for anyone to take seriously. She was a complete nutcase that was so deranged that there was no way for her to ever find a normal guy.

"But you didn't have a wedding ring when I saw you last." He said.

"Why do you think I wear this collar?" She asked.

"Huh?"

"We don't have a typical marriage, so the collar is what denotes our marriage." She said.

Well, that explains it. Her husband is just as crazy as she is. Normally, Aqua is not someone who would kink shame. But he's had bad enough experiences with her fantasies that he wanted nothing to do with it.

As much as he didn't like her, he still did care for Kuro. She was a good, if not crazy woman. So, he was glad she found someone who fit with her... unique interests.

"Back to the topic at hand." Aqua said.

"Right, the language." She laughed.

Aqua knew Kuro was enjoying this. She always enjoyed annoying and teasing him. It was both creepy and endearing at the same time, which was a very weird combination.

"So, I'll come out and say it right now, I don't think it's a language that exists." She said.

"Really?" Aqua asked.

"I sent it to some colleagues of mine who specialize in different areas of the world." She explained. "I don't expect them to find exactly what language it was, but they confirmed to me that this language doesn't belong to any known family of languages."

"Doesn't belong to any families?" Aqua asked.

"Remember, geographically speaking, all languages have similarities to each other." She said. "This is why Chinese, Japanese, and Korean all share similarities in our cultures and languages while Western Europe has nothing in common with Japanese. Languages

belong to different family branches that at one time shared a common tongue and branched off."

"However, some families either influenced each other or converged over time. This is why Latin and Germanic languages have splits, such as English, French, German, Italian, and Spanish. English being a mix of Latin and Germanic, while Spanish has little to no Germanic roots."

"Dear Eren-San's language has no familiar roots in anything. There is no symbol in his language that is even close to modern languages or even offshoots. The sentence structure is also odd as well, though that is still hard to say since we actually can't decode the language without having some kind of translation, like a Rosetta stone type thing."

"So, do you have any idea why he would write like that?" He asked.

"Well, it is his personal journal. It could be coded." She said.

"Coded?" Aqua asked.

"I have a few ideas." She said. "Either he created a coded alphabet that makes it so only he could read it, or maybe he's using a fictional language."

"Fictional language?" Aqua asked.

"If you're familiar with Tolkien's works, he actually wrote entire languages for his series of books." She said. "Elvish and other languages are made up. Even other popular forms of media, like Skyrim, use fake languages that they either made from scratch or based off of existing languages."

"So, you're thinking he could be an Otaku on something?" He asked.

"I'm saying I only checked real languages. I haven't checks to see if maybe he's using a fictional language."

"What if it's coded?" He asked.

"If it's a coded language, nothing short of a Governmental Code Breaker would be able to decode it, and that could take months if not years." She explained. "Unfortunately for you, I neither have the skillset to do that or have any colleagues in that field."

"So, if it's coded, I'll have no way of learning about it." Aqua said.

Aqua wondered if he wanted to. After all, it was just a journal. Probably full of Eren's daily thoughts, maybe some grocery lists, or notes on learning written English. It's perfectly reasonable that he would want privacy, even if a bit extreme. If he's a veteran of Crimea and a former child soldier, Eren would be paranoid, even if it didn't make sense.

"Sorry I couldn't be of more help." Kuro said.

"It's ok, I appreciate it." Aqua said.

"Do you think it's possible about the reincarnation theory with Eren?" She asked. "If he is reincarnated, especially from a long time ago, it would make sense for his language to be unrecognizable."

"Yea, but how far back would he have to go for it not to belong to any family of languages?" Aqua asked.

"Anywhere between hundreds to thousands of years." She giggled. "Academics have a very good understanding of language history and roots, so you'd have to go back far to find something unrecognizable, depending on the region."

"There may have been a delay between me and Ruby, but I don't think the delay would be that crazy." Aqua said. "Plus, it still doesn't explain why he's fluent in English but doesn't know any written language besides this mystery one."

"Some people just are weird." She said.

"If Eren had some weird things about him, or some odd quirks, I'd understand. But this is different. This isn't a weird quirk. This is something that shouldn't exist. There is no way that this can be the case."

"Aqua! Can you hurry up! Mama said that you need to get ready!" Ruby yelled.

"Little sister?" Kuro asked, hearing Ruby yell through the door.

"I'll need to let you go." Aqua said.

"Call me." She giggled.

Aqua hung up, not wanting Ruby to barge in while he was on the phone and ask questions. He didn't need her to rat him out to Ai and explain why he's talking to an unknown woman to ai. With that, he deleted the call history in the phone, specifically Kuro.

"What took you so long?" Ruby asked as he walked out.

Aqua motioned for his slinged arm, causing Ruby to blush at forgetting about his injury.

"Oh, sorry." She said.

"It's ok." He shrugged. "I sometimes forget about it too." Aqua said.

"Does it hurt?" Ruby asked.

"Not really." He lied.

"Are you sure?" Ruby asked.

"Worried about me?" He laughed a bit.

"Well, no." Ruby turned away, pretending not to care. "After all, if something happened to you, Ai would be sad, and I don't want to see her sad."

Aqua smiled a bit, glad his sister was showing a bit of her caring side, even if she was being a bit of a tsundere. He's grown close to Ruby in these past four years and has learned to care for her just as much as Ai. She was young when she died, he knew that, and based on how she reacts sometimes, he could tell it wasn't a pleasant death.

Ruby never really opened up about her past and he couldn't blame her. He could tell she was also worried about being bullied by him if she was younger, so she kept lying by saying she was a grown woman.

It was a kind of innocence that reminded him of something, but he could never think on it. Regardless, he's glad she can live a happier life than her old one with Ai.

"Anyway, it's your turn for the bath." He said, brushing past her.

"Thanks." She said as she went into the bathroom to get ready.

"Just hurry up, Ai wants us to be ready to take us to her rehearsal." He said.

"Why isn't Miyako-San watching us?" Ruby asked before she closed the door.

"Between my running away and the attack, she wants us close to her at all times." He said.

"Well, the first time was all you." Ruby said. "Maybe next time, don't try to run away. Why'd you even do that?"

"I just wanted to be outside." He lied. "Remember, I was an adult. It's difficult to just be constantly escorted everywhere."

"Right..." Ruby said, not entirely believing it. "Whatever, just don't think this means you can steal more of mama's time from me."

Aqua shook his head as Ruby shut the door.

"Why are you bringing him?" Miyako asked in Japanese.

"Eren-San should have an opportunity to see us rehearse." Ai smiled.

"You know that Ichigo has a strict policy on non-associated people at rehearsals." Miyako said.

"He can make an exception for Eren." She said. "He did save his business after all."

Miyako was driving Eren, Ai, and the kids to the rehearsal today. Ai was insistent that Eren joins since she figured he should get a behind the scenes look at how they prepare for a concert so he can appreciate it more.

Ai had her long coat and disguise, but underneath was her yoga pants and loose V-neck shirt that she normally wore during rehearsals. Eren had on his usual jeans and hoodie combo, while Aqua and Ruby were dressed in normal kids clothes.

"That's not the point Ai." Miyako said. "Ichigo has to ensure that the only people who are around you girls in a professional environment are company workers. This prevents leaked pictures or videos that can cause a controversy."

"Eren won't do that, right?" Ai turned towards Eren.

"Ai, you're talking in Japanese." Miyako said.

"I-I know." She blushed. " *You wouldn't do that, right Eren?* " She asked.

" *Do what?* " He asked.

" *What Miyako said-* "

"He doesn't know what we said Ai." She said. " *She means, you won't take pictures or videos of them practicing, right?* "

" *Even if I did know how to do that, why would I?* " He asked. " *I have no interest in starting one of those controversies you all keep talking about. I'd rather see Ai succeed in her career.* "

Ai blushed at his subtle affirmation; he had a way of just saying something that would always cause her to blush. She wondered sometimes if he did it on purpose.

Miyako parked the car outside their rehearsal building and Ai went out in her disguised. The kids stayed near Miyako in case anyone saw them, still maintaining their lie that the kids belonged to Miyako.

Ai went in, practically dragging Eren's hand and wanting to show him the behind the scenes look at being an idol. She was so excited to show him, but to Eren it felt like it was the same thing she showed him at the first concert.

" *This is where we practice dancing.* " She said as she entered the dance room that the other girls were.

They were busy stretching and preparing for the next concert that was not yet scheduled. They waved and greeted Eren and Ai but ran up to hug and hold the kids because of how cute they were.

"Oh no!" Aqua yelled as he hid behind Ai's leg.

"Is little Aqua-Chan shy of a hug from a girl?" Meimei teased.

"No!" He yelled, though it was partially true. He hated being treated like a child. "I don't want you girls crushing me while I have a sling!"

"Aw~" Meimei smiled. "He's lying because he's shy."

Aqua hates idols so much. He loves them, especially Ai, but he hates them so much. He realizes that's a contradiction. He missed the days when he could just enjoy idols behind a TV and not be treated

like an infant. Then again, he never enjoyed idols themselves, more like Ai because of her significance to Serina.

"Leave him be, he is still recovering." Ai said, giggling at how Aqua hid behind her leg.

"He'll fight a Yakuza guy for his mama but hide when I try to hug him?" Meimei asked.

"It's because it's you." Aqua said from his hiding spot.

"You're only saying that because Ai is protecting you." She narrowed her eyes.

"And he's hurt, so he knows you can't do anything." Nino giggled.

"Smart little brat." Meimei said but broke her composure with a giggle. "Soon he'll miss how much women jump at the chance to hug him."

"Aqua-Chan, Ruby-Chan, you two have to wait outside in the hall while we practice. Eren-San too." She said to her kids.

"But I want to watch!" Ruby complained.

"President Saitou said he doesn't want distractions since we'll be preparing for the Tokyo Dome, if we get accepted." Ai said.

"You will." Aqua encouraged.

"I know." She giggled at his encouragement. "But we need to focus. I promise we'll go exploring around the building with Eren-San."

"Ok." She pouted but understood.

It was important that Ai focused on her job without distractions, Ruby knew that. Especially since she needed to be in her top condition in order to be the best idol she can be.

Of course, waiting around was boring in a hallway with chairs. She was used to not doing much since she was in a hospital for most of her previous life, but it didn't mean she was patient. So, Ruby decided to do her own exploring until Ai got out.

"I'm going to explore." She said as she stood out of the chair and ran down the hall.

"I'll come wit-" Aqua was stopped as he felt Miyako grab his uninjured arm.

"You are not going anywhere." She said. "Last time you went out of my sight, I had to deal with a panicking and hysterical Ai."

"Can't you guys let that go." Aqua complained.

"Not until you're old enough to move out." Miyako said. "Every time you run off somewhere, you get yourself into trouble."

Miyako got a lot more caring over the years, but she was still upset about when he ran away. Considering Kuro didn't give him much outside of, it's a weird language, he was wondering if that was worth it.

"See you." She waved as she jogged away.

"But she can go?" Aqua asked.

"She never ran away." Miyako said.

Ruby jogged around, trying to find something to keep her mind occupied. She enjoyed showing up to mama's work and watching her practice. It always inspired her to see the amount of work Ai put in before a concert.

It reminded her of what she thought of Ai back in her previous life. How completely effortlessly Ai made her dancing look. Like she was immediately able to just do it with no issues. Ruby never considered back then that Ai actually struggled sometimes during practice.

She went into one of the empty dancing rooms and walked around, looking at herself in the mirror. She still had on her bright colored hoodie, skirt, and little kids' leggings. There was a box of unused glowsticks in the corner. The box was open and ready to be used in case they needed to practice with those.

She wondered if she could learn how to dance. She thought about it before, but she was always too scared to try. She remembered trying in that hospital room. Trying again and again but failing each and every time.

Ruby tried to get on one leg, imitating a move that Ai did. She stood up and tried really hard to maintain her balance but was unable to. With a pathetic little squeak, Ruby fell down to the floor.

Ruby got up to try again but fell over a second time.

Then a third time.

After that, she laid down on the ground, tears starting to come up from the frustration of not being able to dance.

" *It looks like you're struggling.* " She heard behind her.

Eren was standing, arms crossed, and leaned against the door. She understood some of what he said, but not much. Though, she knew that he was commenting on how she failed.

Ruby stood up, trying, but failing to wipe her tears away.

" *So, you can't dance?* " Eren asked.

" *Canta dans.* " Ruby said sadly.

" *It looks like you want to.* " He said.

Ruby nodded her head, unable and unwilling to hide that fact.

Eren understood what was making her sad right now. In the time they spent together, Eren knew that she was basically a copy of her mother. She did everything her mother did and imitated most, if not all of her mannerisms. There was no doubt that Ruby would want to follow in her mother's footsteps.

Eren kneeled down in front of Ruby and placed a hand on top of her head. Ruby looked at him, now able to look eye level, and raised her eyebrow in a questioning way.

" *Teach me.* " Eren said.

" *Teachu?* " Ruby asked.

" *Teach me to dance like your mother.* " He clarified. " *Teach me, dance like mother.* " He tried slower.

" *Canta.* " Ruby shook her head.

" *So, give up?* " Eren asked.

"Ano..."

" *You give up?* " He asked again.

Ruby looked down, ashamed to have someone call her out on lack of trying. She was too embarrassed to let Ai know that her daughter can't dance. She didn't want Ai to think that she was a failure at the one thing Ai loved so much.

" *So, teach me.* " He said. " *I can't dance, so I'll look dumber than you.* " He smirked.

" *You will looks dumber.* " She giggled.

" *Exactly.* " He laughed. " *Now come on.* "

Eren stood in front of Ruby and let he take point. Ruby started by showing him simply dance moves, mainly how to use footwork. Now

that she was trying to only teach the basics, she didn't have to do the more complex moves that she always tried. She could focus on the small basic things.

Eren looked completely uncoordinated. He clearly had no experience dancing and it showed. He was very heavy on his feet and kept his hips stiff as he stepped around in an imaginary beat. Ruby giggled as she watched him. He fell down a few times, though Ruby could tell it was on purpose to make her laugh.

" *You bada.* " She giggled.

" *Well, I need you to teach me to be better.* " He smiled, suppressing his own giggles.

" *Geta sticks, teachen otaku.* " She said.

" *Get sticks?* " Eren asked. " *Those?* " He pointed to some colored sticks in a box.

"Hai!" Ruby said.

" *Ok, sure.* " He said as he walked over and got some sticks.

He walked over, reached into the box, and pulled out a few different colors for himself and Ruby to practice with.

" *No!* " Ruby yelled.

" *What?* " He asked.

" *Mama's is red!* " She yelled.

" *Huh?* " Eren asked.

" *Mama red, no other!* "

" *The colors have meaning?* " Eren asked.

" *Each glowstick color has a meaning.* " Eren turned at the familiar voice.

Ai was standing near the door, she was bent down and had her phone pointed towards him, probably taking a moving picture with it.

" *What are you doing?* " He asked.

" *Videotaping you and Ruby!* " She cheered. " *You're so adorable!* "

Ai walked closer, focusing the video on Eren's face. He was actually blushing and trying to look away. Ai couldn't help but squeal on the inside at how cute he looked. He was willing to do something embarrassing to cheer up a little girl. How sweet of him.

"Mama." Ruby said.

"And you, you were such an amazing little sensei." She turned to Ruby.

"Thank you, mama." Ruby blushed. "Eren-San is blushing mama, does that mean he like-"

"Shush!" Ai yelled as she tried to cover her daughter's mouth.

" *Are you ok?* " Eren asked.

" *Oh, everything is fine.* " Ai laughed as she let go of Ruby's mouth.

"He can't understand Japanese mama." Ruby said.

"Eto..." Ai forgot, again.

"You need to get better at switching languages mama." Ruby giggled.

"I've been debating for a while on whether I should throw you out a window." Ai glared at Ruby.

"You can't do that, I'm too cute." Ruby stuck her tongue out.

"Oh?" Ai asked.

Ruby screamed as Ai picked her up and started carrying her towards the window. Eren was standing, teasing Ruby the whole time that she was getting rid of her. Ruby was screaming and mock punching Ai.

Eren smiled at the moment, understanding that they were horse playing and enjoying the moment. Despite the yelling, they were both laughing and happy. Ruby tried desperately to escape, but Ai was too strong.

Before Ai reached the window, she put Ruby down, who was still playfully hitting her. After they calmed down from the play fighting, Ai went back over to Eren.

" The glowsticks are a big thing in Japanese idols. " Ai said.

" I noticed. " Eren said. *" Though I didn't know the colors had any significance. "*

" Well, for me, my color is red. So, if you wanted to support me, this is what you would wave. " She explained.

" How do you turn them on? " Eren asked, looking around and not finding a switch.

" You don't turn it on silly. " She giggled. *" Here. "*

Ai took the red glowstick from Eren and bent it until he heard a crack. At first he thought she broke it until she shook it a few times and it started to glow. The glow was hard to see in the bright room, but it was there.

" So, the fans dance with these? " He asked.

" Sometimes, it depends. " Ai said. " Mostly they wave it in the air to show support. You can generally tell who the most popular idol is based on how many glowsticks of a specific color are in the crowd. "

" So, you're the most popular because most of them were red. " Eren said.

" Yea, though I do wish the other girls got some more credit. " Ai said. " My face is too pretty, so I always steal the spotlight. "

" Very humble of you. " Eren cracked a smile.

" Well, it is a fact. " Ai giggled as she flipped her hair. " I am the most amazing idol in history. " She joked, adopting a condescending voice to sell the joke.

" I guess I can learn a thing or two from you about dancing. " Eren said.

" How about we practice when we're home from now on. " Ai told Eren. "What do you think Ruby-Chan? Want to practice dancing at home?"

"Yea." Ruby agreed.

"I'll help you teach Eren-San, he can't dance at all."

"Nope, he's too heavy."

" I know you two are making fun of me. " He said.

" Of course. " Ai giggled.

" Keep up the hard work Ruby. " Eren said, putting a hand on her head. " I know that if you work hard, you'll shine up on stage like your mother one day. "

Ruby looked at him questioningly, not understanding what he was saying. She turned to Ai who smiled at her.

"He said work hard, and you can be like mama." Ai said with a blush, embarrassed that Eren said she shined and was unable to describe it like that.

"I will!" Ruby yelled. "I'll be an idol, just like mama!"

Ruby ran up to Eren and hugged him, only able to wrap her hands around his hips. Eren widened his eyes at the sudden affection.

He never had a moment of familiar affection since his mother died. He never had someone who hugged him in a comforting or loving way. Especially not a child, who showed him a level of affection that he began to realize he craved for.

Eren never considered the idea that he could ever have children. He was too focused with reclaiming the walls to consider it, and when he learned of his limited lifespan due to the curse of Ymir, he gave up on the idea of having a family. The day Historia showed him the future, the day he kissed her hand, he knew how his life was going to end.

This child threw all of that for a loop. He has grown incredibly close to Ai and her children. She was shy, very shy, but he couldn't help but be drawn to her kind and sweet personality. It was something more than the fake persona that she tried to create. He could tell that the real Ai was the woman who cared for her children and treated him with care.

He had to protect this family. Even if they didn't belong to him. Even if Ai never chose to marry him, he swore he'd protect her and her children.

Marry? Is that what he thought? Would he marry her? Eren felt that he could and could tell he desired it. Eren would marry her if he could. She is everything a man should want in a woman.

But for now, he'd avoid that topic. The Devil of Paradis doesn't deserve a happy ending. He doesn't deserve to live happily where

others died. Eren didn't deserve a good and kind woman like Ai.

There was a part of him that wished he still had his powers so the curse of Ymir would still be present. Life would be so much easier if he had a ticking clock to his death. Instead, this feeling of being given a chance for a good and normal life was dangled in front of him and it terrified him.

Regardless of what happened to him, Ai and her children were more important. He swore he'd always protect them.

"Ai, breaks over!" They heard from the hallway.

" *Got to run!* " Ai yelled as she ran out the door. "Come back and stay with Miyako-San Ruby-Chan, I don't want you wandering."

"Ok..." Ruby grumbled.

Eren started walking towards the door but stopped for a moment when he felt Ruby's hand reach out and grab his, much in the same way a child would hold their father's hand. He was still shocked by it, but he held her hand as they walked back.

" *Eren-San.* " Ruby got his attention.

" *Yea?* " Eren asked.

" *Tanks fur save mama.* " She said. " *Evan if hurt.* " She motioned at his still recovering bruises.

Eren traced the stitched cut on his brow, knowing it would be forever scarred. It honestly didn't bother him; he'd die to protect her.

" *Of course.* " He smiled.

" *Ware hurting face with honer fur protecting mama.* "

"... " Eren had very few words to say to that. " *Right.* "

Glad to know she saw him as a sacrificial figure for her mother. The thought made him laugh on the inside since she was so young.

Ai blushed the entire time she was practicing as she imagined Ruby hugging Eren. It looked so right to her, like he was a natural part of her family now. She was so glad that Ruby was able to trust him so much and develop an almost daughter like relationship to him.

He also went over to teach her daughter and make her feel better. He was so kind and soft when he did that, like he knew exactly what to say to her and how to boost her spirits.

It was smart to make her teach him; that way Ruby could focus on basic footwork instead of the more complex moves. He was very patient and willing to do an embarrassing thing just so Ruby could get her practice in.

Eren seemed like he would be an amazing father, any woman would be lucky to have him.

Though Ai got mad for some reason when she imagined him with another woman.

Shaking her head at the thought, she did catch one strange thing though. He looked so... sad, when Ruby hugged him. She couldn't explain it, but Eren just seemed sad and shocked when she showed him just a little bit of childlike affection.

She knew that Eren had a rough life, and she could imagine that as a Soldier, he never had time to think of settling down. Especially since she learned that he was a child soldier. She knew nothing of being a soldier, but she imagined that it was a life of discipline, anger, and fear.

She wondered, did he ever have moments of soft loving care, or moments where he could be around people who would hold him or make him feel better? She was sure he gained relationships with the

people he fought with. She always heard that soldier's form unbreakable bonds in war because of their shared experiences and trauma.

But then again, he said most of the people he knew about died in combat. Did he learn to avoid close relationships in fear of losing them? She couldn't imagine seeing someone close to you die. The only person she saw die was Ryosuke, who even then only died after he left their house. Eren not only saw bad people die, but his friends as well.

There was a hardness to Eren, she knew that from when they first talked. He had moments where he was softer and kinder. She never once saw him as angry or uncaring, not unless he was protecting her. But he was always so sad most of the time.

She did notice that his mood changed though. He smiled more and even joked around. She was sure that he was learning to overcome his trauma, but she was worried that he would go back to being sad.

So, she promised that she would strive to make him happy all the time. Make sure that he never has a sad look on his face and instead show him the care he was denied as a child. She would show him that he had a bright future with her and her family and that he can rest and be cared for.

Not romantically though, not at all. She's just helping him feel better, because she's a good person. That has to be the reason. The blush means nothing. It's not like she imagined herself marrying him or anything. Not even dating, that would be too much.

"I thought the President wanted us to focus on our dancing." Meimei giggled.

"Huh?" Ai asked.

"You're blushing, thinking of a certain someone in the hallwa-" Ai threw a towel in her face. "So rude." Meimei giggled.

"I'm just sweating." Ai said.

"Right, no one believes to Ai." She giggled. "Why don't you just accept that you have feelings for a guy."

"I just..." Ai began. "How am I supposed to approach it. I know you said just ask him, but I get scared. What if what we have now gets ruined or he decides he doesn't want to come over anymore."

"Ai, you're scared of rejection. That's normal, but you need to try to get over that if you ever hope to really move forward with him." Meimei said.

"But if I get rejected, I feel like no one would ever be able to date me." Ai said.

"What's wrong Ai?" Meimei asked seriously.

"I don't want to be alone Meimei." Ai said sadly. "I want someone I care for, someone to hold me and kiss me when I wake up. I want someone to take care of me and make me feel... well... make me feel wanted."

"Ai..." Meimei saighed.

"I just feel so alone." Ai said sadly. "I love my children more than anything, I really do. But I am always the one caring for them. Sure, Miyako helps out; but I want someone else. I want someone to be with me and be a partner to me. To take care of me. Ever since Eren came into my life, I felt like a piece of myself was missing was finally found. Like, there was one thing in my family that I needed."

"Ai."

"And if he rejects me, I'll lose that. I'll go back into that isolated life, hidden from the world and never even have the chance to talk to a guy. Not even have a chance to try and meet someone new. Instead, I'll go back to that same-"

Meimei silenced her with a hug. Ai was on the verge of tears but caught herself before shedding any of them. Meimei understood that she was so scared of rejection because if it fails, she'll have no one to depend on.

"I know it's scary, but sooner or later, something is going to happen." Meimei said. "If you wait too long, Eren may find someone else. And even if he does reject you, at least you'll know. I know it's scary, it was for me when I chased my husband. But you have to at least try something, or you'll lose him if you do nothing."

"Ok." Ai said. "But give me one more week before I try anything."

"Of course." Meimei smiled.

She broke away from the hug and gave Ai a reassuring pat on the head. Ai scowled a bit at being treated like a kid but smiled back at her former rival.

Suddenly, her phone vibrated and she opened it. She had a message.

"Who's it from?" Meimei asked.

"Kamiki-San." Ai said, causing Meimei to narrow her eyes.

"What does he want?" She asked.

"He said he wants to get coffee and try one more time to reconnect." Ai said.

"Don't." Meimei said. "He had his chance."

"I don't intend to." Ai said. "But I think I will go with him."

"What?" Meimei asked. "Why?"

"He still has a right to his children, so we do need to have some kind of relationship, even if it's entirely professional." Ai said.

"True." Meimei said.

"I'll have coffee with him and clear the air. Let him know that we are done and make sure he understands that. We could also go over how to get the kids comfortable with being with him." She explained.

"Good idea." Meimei said. "I can come with you, if you want."

"No, it's a private thing for us." Ai said. "I'll accept the invitation but only to talk and let him down easy. I'm sure it'll be ok."

"Are you sure?" Meimei asked. "He was violent before."

"He'd be stupid to cause a scene in a cafe." Ai said. "Not only could people find out who we both are, but it could ruin both of our careers. So, I know he won't try anything in public. Besides, I'll set a time for the busiest part of the day and only take public transportation. If he does try anything, he'll immediately get arrested."

"Do you think it'll come to that?" She asked.

"No." Ai said. "I do believe Kamiki-San when he said he changed. At least, I'd like to give him a second chance in that regard. But there will be nothing left for us together outside of the kids. And I know he'd never do anything to hurt the kids."

"Are you sure?" She asked. "If he was abusive towards you, what are the odds he'd-"

"Be abusive towards his kids?" Ai asked. "No way, there's no way that would happen. And even if he was, nothing in the world will save him from me." Ai winked as she flexed her arm.

"You could always sick Eren on him." Meimei giggled.

"Eren would have to get in line." She giggled.

"If you're sure Ai." She said.

"I'll make sure Miyako-San watches the kids while I see him." Ai said.
"Once that is over and behind me, I'll try to talk with Eren seriously about it."

"It?" Meimei grinned. "Be specific A-" A towel went into her face again. "Fair enough." She giggled.

This was an interesting chapter to write. Especially finally delving into Ai's fears of rejection. It can't be easy to live such an isolated life.

We'll be coming up on the Ginza attack soon, so first I'll need to set a few more things up lol. Hope the chapters don't feel like they're dragging on. I personally feel the slower and more wholesome moments are needed but let me know if it's too much. I am trying to ensure that all relationships are at least moving forward without backtracking, so hopefully it's succeeding lol.

Hope you enjoyed and please let me know your thoughts. Good, bad, or in between lol.

Eren Recruits Miyuki

Chapter 30: Eren Recruits Miyuki

Ai got off the train near the station that the café was. As part of her agreement to meet up with Kamiki-San, she specified some conditions for him, specifically, that they meet during the busiest part of the day and that she picks the café they meet at. He agreed with no arguments.

She dressed nice, since she felt it would be appropriate to at least try to look good for him, even if she was planning to let him down. She didn't want him to feel like he was an afterthought by not taking this meet up seriously.

She had on a nice, checkered dress that went down to her knees, and a frilly white shirt underneath. She had on a wide brim hat and her sunglasses and her hair in a bun, mostly to hide her identity but also make herself look nice.

She entered the café and looked around for Kamiki-San. He was over by a table near the window and dressed in a nice black suit but a turtleneck light sweatshirt underneath the jacket. He had glasses on, but he wasn't as famous as he used to be, so he was less worried about people recognizing him.

"Good morning Ai-Chan." He smiled as he stood up and helped her into the seat.

"I got it Kamiki-San, thank you though." She said respectfully, moving her own seat and sitting down.

He sat back down across from her. A server came over and asked if they wanted any coffee or tea.

"I'll take a green tea, one extra spoonful of sugar please." Kamiki-San said. "And she'll take a cinnamon-"

"I'm sorry, but can I actually get an iced latte please?" Ai cut him off. "I'll take a small size."

The woman nodded as she took the information down. She turned around and went back to go get their drinks ordered and prepared.

"You don't like cinnamon anymore?" He asked.

"I got away from any tea with too much sugar." She giggled. "I must be careful since I had children and I'm no longer a girl. Soon, I'll have to really worry about what I put in my body, so I figured I'd start now."

"Made me feel like a fool." He joked, hoping to clear the tension.

"You have to learn to keep up with my tastes." Ai joked as well, though it was somewhat forced for her.

There was a bit of an awkward silence between them before the barista returned with their drinks. She handed them their drinks and walked away after Kamiki-San gave her the money.

"I'm sure you know why I asked you to come here." He said.

"I know." Ai said. "I understand that you want to restart what we had."

"Ai-Chan." He bent forward over the table.

His face was soft and hopeful, like he was almost desperate to get on her good side and maybe restart something between them.

"I've thought a lot about it, and after seeing the kids, I can't help but imagine us together again." He said, looking down at the table.

"I know." Ai said calmly.

"I realized how much I gave up when we both went our separate ways. How I chose to pursue my career over a life with you. How I let my anger get the better of me and caused you pain. I understand that you have reservations about being together again, but I want you to know that I truly do adore you."

"I want us to be together again. To maybe be a family that we walked away from. I know you still have residual feelings for me, and that you have considered it, but I can't help but want you again. More than anything else."

"All I ask is for another chance, to show you that not only can I be a good man to you, but a good father to the kids as well. We don't have to start out as officially dating, but I want to at least take you on a few dates. Just us, no one around. So that I can convince you that it would be the right choice to be together."

Ai felt her heart go out to him. He seemed so desperate to be with her. He looked sad and confused and it made Ai feel sorry for him.

She had no doubt that, if he did change, he would be a good man for her. He'd be a good husband who she'd fall in love with, and she knew their children would grow to love him. There were still feelings there, feelings of affection that screamed at her to give him another chance.

But she knew that it was over between them. She did want to pursue a friendship and non-romantic relationship, but she didn't want to date him. She knew she'd have to keep him in her life since he had a right to their children and could even be friends with him. But there was nothing there anymore.

"Hikaru." Ai sighed as she reached out her hands and grasped his own.

Hikaru looked at her, almost hopeful that she would try again and be with him. There was a hope in his eyes, and she was afraid that she was going to hurt him.

"I have always been a terrible and selfish person." Ai began. "But I can't be with you in that way again. I still have some feelings for you, but I can't see myself acting on them or being with you. We had our chance back then and we both decided to go our separate ways."

"That day, when you hurt me and I walked away, I was very mad at you. The conversation we had on the phone after that, and the agreement we made to stay away from each other for the good of our careers was what ended it. I want to have a relationship with you, but only for the sake of our children. Please understand me."

His face went neutral, as if he was contemplating something. The sadness was almost entirely gone, replaced by such a neutral expression that Ai briefly wondered if he was sad at all.

"Is it because of Eren?" He asked.

Ai was taken aback by the accusation. While she knew she had feelings for Eren, his involvement was not a part of the reason why she rejected him. Even if Eren wasn't here, she'd still reject him for the same reasons she gave.

"That's personal Kamiki-San, please don't bring that up." She said, letting go of his hands.

"You care for him more than me?" He asked.

Where was this coming from? She could understand maybe some jealousy, but this was not at all apart of the conversation. Eren had nothing to do with her decision.

"I don't care for him anymore or less." She said. "It has nothing to do with the reason, I already told you why and he's not part of the reason."

"Just give me one date Ai." He said, leaning closer to her. "We can go see a new movie and I can take you back to my hotel. Let me convince yo-"

"Hotel?" Ai asked.

"It's not in either of our names so there won't be a controversy or anything." He said.

"That's not the issue." Ai said, now very offended.

"Then what is?" How does he not know!?

"Do you think that even if we went on a date, that I'd jump back into bed with you on the first date?" She asked.

"That's not what I intende-"

"No." Ai said. "I don't want to hear it. You just automatically assume that I'd jump right into bed with you despite the seriousness of the conversation we were having? Do you think so lowly of me that I would do something like that? Do you think of me as nothing less than a desperate woman?"

"I wasn't asking to sleep with you, just to spend the night. I never intended to put any advances towards you." He said and Ai couldn't see any dishonesty in his face.

Then again, she never once saw him lie, or at least detect his lies. He was always so much better at lying than she was, especially during production and jobs when they were younger. So, she didn't entirely believe him, even if she detected no dishonesty from him.

"I am sorry then." She calmed down, intending to grasp the olive branch she was offered so they didn't make a scene. "But I can't do that. Even if we do nothing, it is still inappropriate."

Ai put some money on the table to pay for her drink and stood up, prepared to leave.

"I appreciate the talk Kamiki-San, but I think we should-" Ai was cut off.

She felt a pressure around her arm and looked down. Kamiki was grabbing her upper arm and holding her in place, preventing her from leaving the table. His face was still neutral and calm, though she felt terrified right now from the contact.

"Listen Ai." He said. "It's completely unfair to just leave like that."

"You're hurting me." Ai whimpered, her tough and confident exterior now gone.

"You can't just leave like that after all the planning I made for today."

"Let go!" Ai yelled, trying to yank free from his grip.

"Hey!" Someone said nearby.

Kamiki let go, not wanting to cause a scene. Suddenly, there was a man dressed in a business casual style come up to Ai and stand in front of her to protect her from Kamiki.

"Get the fuck back." He said.

"Sorry, just an accident." Kamiki said, the cracks in his persona beginning to show.

"You better get lost." The man said.

"Of course, didn't mean to make a scene." He said.

Kamiki took out his wallet and paid for his own drink, before turning around and walking out the door. There were whispers in the café of what he was doing and even a few hushed accusations saying that he was an abuser.

"Are you ok?" The man asked Ai.

Ai calmed herself, trying to prevent the tears from coming back. He hadn't changed, not one bit. She was so glad that she didn't give him

that chance because she knew that eventually, that side would come out again.

She wasn't even comfortable with him seeing the kids anymore. What if he got angry and hurt Aqua or Ruby? Was it possible? Was it possible for a parent to hurt their own children?

Ai thought back to her own mother... of course it was. Her own mother was a terrible human being. A terrible person who deserved nothing less than the worst possible life. If her own mother could hurt her own child, it's not stretch that Kamiki could do the same.

"I'm fine, thank you, but I need to leave." She said.

She glanced at the man who saved her. She noticed some tattoos under his sleeves and immediately assumed he was a Yakuza, but she stopped that thought. Tattoos, while still frowned upon in Japan, was starting to become more common and accepted. They were no longer signs that someone was a Yakuza or delinquent.

Besides, Yakuza were criminals, and criminals were bad people. There is no way one would protect her.

"I'm going home, thank you, but please excuse me." Ai said, her adrenaline kicking in.

Ai turned away and walked out the opposite door from the one Kamiki went through. She saw him walking down the street and went towards the station in the opposite direction. She just wanted to get home where Eren was.

Eren is strong and kind, he would protect her. He did so twice before, and she had no doubt that he would keep her safe. She briefly admitted to herself that she did see him as a protector for her, so she wanted to get in the safety of her home with him being nearby.

She wanted to call him, but he was at work. She didn't want to disturb him because she knew he'd rush over and put his job at risk.

She didn't want to put him in a position where he had to choose between protecting her or keep his job. So, unless she had to, she'd just wait for him to get home.

She rushed into the station and scanned her card to get in, heading over to the train to get home.

"Do you have any idea how hard it was to get this kid?" Sergei asked.

"I'm assuming hard." Eren said.

"He may not be rich, but he goes to school in very wealthy place. Getting him without anyone noticing was not easy." He complained.

"I get it Sergei." Eren said.

Eren walked into one of Sergei's abandoned warehouses that he'd use for deals or transfers of weapons. Inside, in the center of the floor, was a young man who was tied to a simple chair and had a burlap sack over his head. Eren heard muffled sounds coming from the sack, implying that Sergei probably gagged him.

"Is this necessary?" He asked.

"I had to keep him from running, you need to talk to him, and he wasn't exactly going to get into the car with me." Sergei said.

"I can't blame him." Eren said.

"Funny, very funny." He said. "So, what's your angle here? How are you going to convince him. I hope you thought of something."

"He will." Eren said. "Especially when we let him know that Kaguya is in danger."

"What makes you so sure?" Sergei asked. "Just because he likes girl, doesn't mean he'll be willing to get her back."

"He will." Eren said. "But I'll need you here for intimidation as well."

"So, good cop and bad cop?" Sergei asked.

"What does that mean?" Eren asked.

"Never mind." Sergei said.

Eren walked up to the tied up kid and took a nearby chair and sat down in front of the tied boy. He knew someone was moving around and tried to scream at him, probably to let him go.

Eren turned to Sergei and nodded. Sergei took that as the cue to remove the burlap bag. The sweaty and red face of Miyuki was revealed, a piece of cloth tied between his teeth.

"Emmphen!?" He yelled into the cloth in surprise.

"Calm down Miyuki." Eren said. "I know you know English, so let's talk. Remove his gag."

Sergei did as he was told, untying the back of the gag and letting him take a few unobstructed breaths. Miyuki worked his jaw for a second before yelling out in anger.

"I had a feeling you kidnapped Shinomiya!" He yelled out.

"Really?" Eren asked.

"I thought it was weird that she disappeared the moment we met you, a supposed Ukrainian veteran! I wondered if you were that western Yakuza guy! But I didn't bring it up since I had no other proof! Now I know!"

"You're right, he is smart." Sergei laughed.

"That surprised me honestly." Eren said.

"Where is she!?" He yelled, struggling in the chair.

"No idea." Eren said.

"You kidnapped her! Tell me where she is!" He demanded.

Miyuki was very emotionally compromised right now, which was perfect. He could tell that Sergei agreed. Even tied up, helpless in front of two criminals, Miyuki only thought of his love's safety over his own.

"I didn't kidnap her." Eren said.

"Are you using Ai and her kids too!?" He accused. "Are you forcing them to comply!?"

"No." Eren said. "Ai has nothing to do with anything."

"Then why!?" He asked.

"Look, I don't know where Kaguya is, but I know who took her." He said.

"You didn't?" Miyuki asked.

"No, I was only helping Ai find her child. I'm unrelated to that, but I know who took her." Eren explained.

"Who?" Miyuki asked.

"The leader of the Isagawa-Kai, Yoshida." He said.

"But the police were saying it was that new Yakuza group." He said, remembering some of the news that came out recently about it.

"Yoshida wants to pin the blame on them and have Kaguya released with that knowledge. That way he can wipe them out." He said.

"So that's why." Miyuki said. "Then why am I here?" He asked.

"I happen to be very recognizable and lack the ability to speak Japanese." Eren said. "Once we find her, I need someone trustworthy to go in and get her out. Someone to pose as a regular gang member."

"So why me?" He asked.

"Because you care for her, so I know you'll be trustworthy. Plus, I can't trust someone in the yakuza to stand against Yoshida."

"But why?" He asked. "Aren't you a criminal?"

"I was forced to join, because he's using Ai against me." Eren said.

"Forced?" He asked.

"I had to do what I had to in order to survive. Once I met Ai, she has been used to manipulate me. So I'm as stuck in this life as you are about to be." Eren said.

"You do care about Ai?" He asked.

"That's not relevant." Eren said. "What is, is that you care about Kaguya, so we'll need your help."

"Once you find out where she is, why don't you go to the police?" Miyuki asked.

"Because Yoshida protects Ai from the Nakano-Kai. If anything interferes with that, nothing will stop the Nakano-Kai from killing Ai." He explained. "I need Yoshida to protect Ai, and in exchange, I serve him. So, I can't have the police attacking Yoshida."

"Why are they trying to kill Ai?" He asked.

"To get at me. It's a long story, but I can't involve the police or else Ai will be in danger." He explained.

"As bad as that is, I'd rather trust the police to save Kaguya and protect Ai over you. So, give me one good reason why I shouldn't just go to the police?" Miyuki asked.

"Sergei." Eren said, getting up and letting Sergei sit in front of the tied-up Miyuki.

"Do you think I'm scared?" Miyuki asked with a slight break in his voice, clearly trying to sound strong. "Do what you want to me, I will not work with you just because you have a sob story. I trust the police to protect Ai over you."

Sergei took out a cigarette and lit it, taking a small puff before exhaling it. He took out his phone and unlocked it, before scrolling through some information.

"You know, I actually have no prepared way to threaten you." He said. "Sure, I could threaten or hurt you, but that won't get us anywhere. Moment you are not in sight, police will come down on us. So, how do you threaten someone?" He asked Miyuki.

"I-"

"Ah, you keep your social media security setting on, good man." Sergei said, browsing through his phone.

"Y-yea." Miyuki said, unsure of what he was implying.

"Shirogane... Shirogane." Sergei muttered to himself. "Ah, it seems someone isn't as cautious." He said.

Sergei turned the phone around to face Miyuki. Eren caught a glimpse of the picture and it was a young girl with very light colored hair and posing in a white dress like uniform.

"This is you sister, Da?" He asked.

"Y-yes." Miyuki stuttered.

Sergei took the phone back and went through it some more.

"She goes to the same line of school you do, though the lower education one. Interesting." He commented. "It seems that she also complains a lot about her big brother, but I can tell she does care for you and vice versa."

Miyuki's eyes were wide, and he was beginning to sweat as Sergei read out his sisters information out loud.

"Ah, I know that street." He said, showing a picture of his sister posing in a street. "Do you know that it is deserted normally when she goes home? I wonder if this is the route she takes when going home. It would make taking her very easy."

"I get it!" Miyuki said.

"Do you?" Sergei laughed in a sadistic way. "Do you understand what I can do to the people you love? If I wanted to make you pay, all I have to do is sell her overseas. Maybe to some foreign red-light district or an underground brothel in Latin America. She would make me decent money."

"Maybe, I'll make you suffer. I'll return her home, every day, one piece at a time. Maybe first a finger, then a toe when she runs out of those. Then keep going until she dies. When she does, I'll keep mailing home pieces, making you wonder which piece of this body part is the moment she perished."

"Now, maybe you go to the police and maybe I'll be caught. Unlikely, since Sergei isn't even my real name. Maybe you get protected custody for you and your family, but eventually, they will stop. And when they do, even if it's years from now, I'll make your life a living hell. Unless you want to be in protected custody for the rest of you and your family's lives."

Miyuki had his head down and was shaking from Sergei's threats. He had no words, nothing he could say. He was clearly in complete

shock, unable to even look at the older Russian in the face.

"Sergei, a word." Eren said.

Sergei stood up and went with Eren outside of Miyuki's range of hearing. Eren whispered in a low and angered voice to him.

"What the hell was that?" He asked.

"What, he should be ok with working with you now." Sergei said.

"After all that?" Eren asked.

Eren was used to torture, both receiving and giving. He's seen the small occasions that they would have to start cutting fingers or removing nails back during his military days, but that was messed up by his standards. That's the kind of stuff that would make former Premier Zackly proud.

"I wouldn't do anything like that." Sergei defended.

"Really?" Eren asked, wondering if he had to start considering Sergei a threat.

"Not only is all that immoral, but it's entirely impractical." He said.

"Impractical?" Eren asked.

"What, I'm going to smuggle a teenage girl out of Japan? How would I even do that effectively? It's way too risky and has very little monetary gain compared to the amount I'd have to bribe or pay to get her off the island and I'd probably spend more money than I'd make."

"The box thing?" Eren asked.

"Completely impossible. What, I send human body parts in the postal services, hope that somehow an X-ray doesn't detect it, and get caught on camera delivering it to the office? I'd have to give a return

address and buy a stamp. I'd probably get caught the moment it goes through the machine."

Eren understood half of what he said, but agreed it seemed impractical.

"Thing is," Sergei continued. "He doesn't know that. And I am scary evil criminal who he thinks would follow through. I don't need to actually do anything, as long as he believes that I would."

"That's still messed up Sergei." Eren said.

"Why would I risk my reputation and business to save teenage girl only to send another teenage girl into trafficking?" Sergei asked.

WACK!

"Ow!" Eren said as he was hit in the back of the head by Sergei.

"Think next time, I am offended you think I would." Sergei said. "I am criminal, but not fucking sadist. Give me some credit."

"Fine." Eren grumbled. "Let's just get this over with." He said.

"Da." Sergei said.

Eren turned around and went back to Miyuki, who was still looking down. Eren admitted, Sergei's approach was effective.

"Look Miyuki, we won't do that, at least I won't." Eren said, deciding to at least let him believe those options were still there. "But we do want to save Kaguya, without compromising Ai's safety. I won't force you to help, but we need someone to help."

"Will this really save Shinomiya?" He asked, looking up.

"Yes." Eren said.

"Will you leave my sister alone?" He asked.

"I promise you." Eren said. "Once the Nakano-Kai are dealt with, you can turn me into the police. But not until after Ai is safe."

"You care about her, don't you?" Miyuki asked.

"Same way you care for Kaguya." Eren said.

"Fine." Miyuki said.

"We'll act after this weekend." Eren said. "If all goes well, Yoshida will return her without us intervening, making this whole thing pointless. If not, we will need to get her out of there so that she isn't a pawn in this war."

"Just tell me what I need to do." Miyuki said.

"We'll need you to pose as a general Yakuza member and sneak into the location Kaguya is hidden. We'll have you escort her own, pretending to be a prisoner or hostage transfer. If anything goes wrong, I'll come in to give you a forceful exit." Eren explained.

"Forceful?" Miyuki asked.

"I'll have to shoot your way out. I'll have a mask on, so they won't realize who I am. I just can't sneak in since I'm not Japanese and I can't speak the language." He said.

"Ok." Miyuki said with a little bit of hesitation. "Only if you promise that this will save Shinomiya."

"I promise it will." Eren said. "That being said, we'll have to meet here so Sergei can teach you how to survive in there on your own."

"Why me?" Sergei asked.

"You know more about posing as a criminal than I do." Eren said.

"You're Akuma No Ko, why don't you teach him." Sergei complained.

"We both know I am terrible at being in organized crime." Eren said.
"What do you always say? I'm a good soldier but a bad criminal."

"Fair point." Sergei groaned.

"We'll meet up tomorrow." Eren said as he took a knife and cut Miyuki free from the chair. "We'll start drawing up plans and training. Hopefully, this won't be needed if Yoshida releases her next week, but we'll need to still prepare."

"I'll find her, but I am not going to help if things get violent. I still have business." Sergei said.

"That's fine." Eren said.

"I really don't like this." Miyuki said. "As long as I keep my mouth shut, stay away from my sister."

"Da." Sergei said. "I am good businessman, I keep promises." Sergei said. "Betray us, and you lose sister." Sergei lied.

"I understand." Miyuki said, still worried for the safety of his sister.

"Get some rest for tonight." Eren said.

Aqua didn't like the conversation he was hearing when he snuck up to Ai's door. She seemed to be acting strange when she got home, and he wasn't sure why. She said she was running errands and left the kids in the care of Miyako while she did.

However, when she got home, she was acting worried. She his it while the kids were around, but he did realize that she seemed spooked. He wondered if maybe someone recognized her. That would explain her worried expression.

She went into her bedroom and told them that she was getting changed. He doubted that, so he went to the door and tried to listen

in.

"Meimei, hey. How are you?" She asked on the phone.

He couldn't hear Meimei since she didn't put speaker on, so he'd only be able to hear Ai.

"I met with Kamiki." Ai said.

What!? She did what!?

"You were right, he hasn't changed at all." Ai said with a slight waver in her voice. "We were talking, and I let him know that I didn't feel comfortable in going out with him. He started accusing me of choosing Eren over him and I tried saying Eren has nothing to do with the choice."

"Yea, then he was talking about how he already reserved a hotel for us. He even did so without using his own name so we didn't get into a controversy. Then he got upset when I walked away. He, well, he grabbed my arm and wouldn't let me leave."

"No, I'm fine. Some random person stepped in. I'm glad I chose to meet publicly. I don't want to see him again; I don't even want to have Aqua or Ruby near him anymore. If he acts that way with me, what would happen if he got mad at the kids?"

"I know, I don't think he'd do that, but I don't want to take the risk. I just don't feel comfortable with them being around him. Especially Aqua-Chan. He's still recovering and hurt. If Kamiki even got a little aggressive with him, he could suffer serious harm."

"Thank you, I appreciate it. No, I don't want to tell Eren. I'm worried that he might actually try to confront him. You know how the legal system treats foreigners. Even if it's self-defense, he could get arrested if they got violent. So, I don't want it to be anything. I just don't want to think about him anymore."

Soon, the conversation shifted to something else, but by then Aqua stopped paying attention.

She went out alone with him. Aqua wondered if the reason Hikaru picked a hotel for her to visit, without using his name, that he would try to kill her personally. His plans have been failing thanks to himself and Eren, but he might try to get more desperate.

It won't be long before he starts targeting Ruby and himself to get at Ai. Hikaru will no doubt try to use them against her, especially to try and get her alone. If he was to save Ai, he had to think of something.

Eren was good as a passive defense, and the relationship between Eren and Ai ensured that they stayed together most of the time. But Eren won't take a more direct and active defense of Ai unless he knows the situation.

Hikaru is no doubt getting desperate too. All his plans keep running into issues. Between Aqua and Eren, Hikaru can't get at Ai through direct or indirect means. So, he's trying to find any chance to get Ai alone and kill her.

So, Aqua would have to find a way to counter that. Aqua would need to be more proactive in stopping Hikaru, but the problem is that Aqua is not only a child but doesn't have a use of his arm. He's still severely injured and would be entirely defenseless in any kind of confrontation.

If he was going to take care of Hikaru himself, he'd need to find a way to even the fight. Even it in a way that would ensure that he would have the chance to kill him and Hikaru would be defenseless.

He briefly wondered about acting on the idea that maybe Eren was reborn as well, but it was too risky since he didn't want to open that door unless absolutely necessary. It was entirely a gamble.

So how? How can Aqua take on Hikaru, a full-grown man with at least basic hand to hand skills? Hikaru was no athlete in MMA, but

you didn't need to be an athlete to beat up a four-year old.

"Aqua-Chan, are you ok?" Ai asked when she came out of the door.

"Yea, my arm hurts." He said, which was partially true since it was sore.

"Let me get your medicine." She said as she moved to the counter.

"I'm ok, I don't need it." He waved off.

"Sweety, you need to take your medicine. It helps with the pain." She said as she kneeled down to him.

And risk getting addicted? No thank you. If he wasn't reborn, sure. But he didn't want to test addictive substances with this young body.

"Listen sweetie, I know it has side effects, but the doctor said that you'll be ok. I promise." She tried.

"I'm fine A-" Wait...

He thought back to some of his original ideas to deal with Hikaru. How, at the time, he could do nothing to get them since he was so young, and Ai wouldn't let him have sharp objects. He'd be unable to get them since he's a child and Ai wouldn't let him.

But now, now he could get them.

Aqua looked down at his arm, then back at the pain medication. The idea was already forming in his head. He was a doctor after all, he knew medication and the impacts certain medicinal drugs have on the human body.

He looked up at Ai, knowing that she was about to get very mad tomorrow when he went for his medical checkup at the hospital. He was going to do something incredibly stupid, but normal for a kid to do. Ai would likely be very mad, but he'd have to if he wanted to get the tools he'd need to save her life.

"I'm ok Ai, really." He said.

He walked over to Ai and hugged her, showing her that he was fine. Ai looked shocked for a moment but gave him a gentle smile, since she was starting to get used to his more affectionate side.

"I love you Aqua-Chan." Ai said.

"I love you too Ai." He said.

He really did. He loved her very much. In some ways, Aqua felt as if he was starting to see her as his mother. He never had a mother, but he wanted to imagine that she would have been like Ai. Caring, sweet, kind, and gentle.

Maybe he was falling for his own lie, that being the lie that he was a child. But now, he resolved himself to protect Ai.

"I want a hug!" Ruby screamed from across the room.

"Then come here Ruby-Chan!" Ai yelled back.

"Watch the arm!" Aqua yelled as Ruby tackled into the group hug.

Yes, he even loved Ruby, despite his better judgement. He needed to keep her safe just as much as he protected Ai.

Even if it was risky, even if it killed him, he'd stop Hikaru and save this family. He swore it.

"I love you." Ai said, holding both of her children in her arms.

After dropping Miyuki off near his home, Sergei drove Eren back to his own home. Both were in the car, thinking about their next plan.

"So, what's next between you and single mom?" Sergei asked.

"What do you mean?" Eren asked.

"You thinking of doing something more with her?" Sergei asked.

"What, like marrying her?" Eren asked.

"A bit rushed for your generation." Was it? He knew Ai for a few weeks now. "But if that's what you want, sure."

"I don't know." Eren said. "I caused her so much trouble already. I don't know if I deserve her."

Eren thought about it, he really did. Even with the war in the Yakuza, he still had moments to relax and think for once in his life. Moments to just enjoy a more civilian lifestyle and not always concerned about the next big fight. No reclaiming lands, no wars between nations, and no genocides. Just, relax and live a humble life.

Eren felt like he could marry her. He could finally admit that to himself.

"Do I deserve to have her, even though I put her in danger?" Eren asked Sergei.

"You did what you had to in order to survive." Sergei said. "Sure, it wasn't always best, but you defend and protect her. Besides, you need to be close to her anyway to protect her. Why not think of going to next level?"

"She deserves someone better." Eren said.

"Maybe, but maybe you deserve someone better too." He said. "Who cares about what we deserve. Care more about what you want. If she wants you, who cares if she deserves you or not."

"I put her in danger." Eren said sadly.

"She was in danger from the moment she got popular." Sergei said. "If anything, she's safer now thanks to Yoshida."

"If I am discovered, what then?" Eren asked. "I can't be a citizen in this country."

"What if she marry's someone else and that man walk into street and die?" Sergei asked. "Don't worry so much about what ifs Eren. You can find different way to live outside of criminal life. She lives in hiding too, so she is in same boat as you."

"I guess." Eren said.

"Give it a try." Sergei said. "Give a second chance a try, even if it's a gamble."

Maybe it was selfish, but Eren did want Ai. He wanted to live a life with her, to move on from the past and live a better life. He wondered about if he ran away with Mikasa, wondered about how they could have lived his remaining four years in a simple life. Eren longed for that, wanted that. He wanted a simple and humble life.

"Next week." Eren said to Sergei.

"Huh?" He asked.

"After the Ginza attack, I'll resolve my feelings with Ai. Whether the war continues or ends at Ginza, I'll resolve everything I feel about her."

"What will you say?" Sergei asked.

"I'll ask Ai to marry me." He said.

Another fun one to write. Now Eren, Miyuki, and Aqua are preparing for their individual confrontations. Three different events coming up and all going to impact the future of the story while Ai and Eren also learn to develop their feelings.

With Ai, a lot of times abuse victims can want to believe their abuser changed and want to give them a chance to be better. Ai was ok with giving him a chance, but knew that their relationship was over. She hoped he would at least want a future with his children, but now she realizes that he's not exactly interested in his kids.

So, Ai isn't too naive, but she was willing to try with Hikaru outside of a romantic relationship. I hope that came off as making Ai seem very compassionate but not stupid. Of course, this is all interpretation so the Manga may invalidate this if we learn more about their relationship lol.

Sergei also maybe went a bit overboard, but it worked lol. Miyuki is fully convinced. Hope it comes off as realistic, after all, Miyuki has a point. From his perspective, he would trust the police to protect Ai and Kaguya over Eren.

My intent was both sides would have legitimate arguments from their sides and in the end, it would take a threat to convince Miyuki. Eren can't afford for the police to interfere with Yoshida, and Miyuki wants the police to save Kaguya and protect Ai. It takes threatening his sister to make him relent.

Let me know if you guys think that's realistic.

Hope you enjoyed.

Preparing for Ginza

Chapter 31: Preparing for Ginza

"How are you feeling Aqua-Chan?" Ai asked as she finished putting on Aqua's shoes.

"I'm hurting mama." He said with a wince.

"Aqua-Chan, I know you don't want your medication, but you need it for the pain." Ai tried once again to convince him.

"But-" Aqua whined.

"Please Aqua-Chan, mama promises it will make you better." She said.

"... Ok." Aqua said quietly.

Ai quickly went over to her counter to get his medication and a small bottle of water. She struggled at first to open the bottle but finally did and took one pill, following the doctors instructions. Aqua just had breakfast so he will take it on a full stomach.

She found it a bit odd that he finally caved and decided to take one, but she assumed it was because the pain was worse than normal. She hoped he was doing alright, but he did seem to whine a bit more today.

However, it was part of Aqua's plan. Normally, medication comes with a list of side effects. This particular one is drowsiness, but there can also be unsuspected side effects that can occur depending on the individual person. While medication was very predictable and safe, sometimes people can react differently.

So, it wouldn't be odd if he got hyper and made a mess of things before crashing into exhaustion. It would explain his upcoming erratic behavior and hopefully lessen his punishment if he lied and said it was outside of his control. For a four-year-old, it was the perfect get out of jail free card.

Although he didn't want to take the medication, he did since he figured this was a good enough reason to risk a possible addiction. He trusted that his adult mind wouldn't be overpowered by his youthful body. At least, he hoped.

"There, easy." Ai smiled.

"I'm feeling better." He said, which was actually the truth.

"I love you." Ai said.

"Love you mama." Ruby replied.

"Me too." Aqua said.

"Aqua-Chan~" Ai glared at him.

"I do." He said.

"Say it." Ai said.

"I love you too." Aqua said.

"Good boy." Ai smiled and kissed him on the top of the head.

Due to the sensitive nature of Ai's identity, even though his particular doctor was aware of the circumstances with Ai and had to sign an NDA in order to keep Ai's identity a secret. That mixed with the disguise gave them a safe cover.

However, Miyako was there just in case she was recognized, and Ai could simply say she was escorting her boss's children.

The family, plus Miyako arrived at the parking lot in front of the hospital. The kids got out and Ai as well.

"Be good you two." Ai said. "And stay out of trouble."

"I will." Aqua lied.

"Me too mama." Ruby said truthfully.

"I love you." Ai said.

"Love you too mama." She said.

"You too Ai." Aqua said.

"Aqua-Chan~" She glared again.

That thing about showing more affection to Ai because he wanted her to feel loved, Aqua was starting to regret it. Ever since she said she loved them; she said it all the time now. Every day, maybe eight times a day. He counted once before.

And if she didn't get the words back, she would hound them until she did. Ruby was easy, she went along with it. But Aqua was getting annoyed at having to repeat it over and over again.

"Stop being stoic and tell your mama you love her." Ai said.

"I said it three times today." He grumbled.

"Say it a fourth time." Ai giggled.

"I love you too." He said.

"We're going Ai." Miyako shook her head.

Ai giggled. She now fully knew her son loved her. She had no doubts anymore on that. But she still loved watching him be all manly and

complaining about showing affection. She loved that side of him. It was so cute to see her little baby boy try to act like a man.

Which he was, technically.

Despite the embarrassment, Aqua did smile at himself with the little interaction. It was annoying, but he was really glad that Ai was showing them so much affection. He recognized that it was still new for her and that she was finally getting over her emotional scars from her childhood.

After going into the waiting room, Aqua was getting ready to put his plan into action.

It was a simple plan. He intended to steal some drugs and a syringe that he would use on Hikaru. He had no real plan or ability to do it subtly, so he decided to do so in a way only a four-year-old child would. And that was to make a complete mess of everything around him.

He'd react hyper aggressively and run around, causing childlike mischief as much as possible in order to get a chance at getting the medicinal drugs. His best excuse was simply that he was a mischievous child who was getting into trouble.

Although, he'd have to hide the drugs since Ai would never let him keep those. Luckily, he had the perfect spot that wouldn't be disturbed. His sling. Once he had his checkup, he'd put his plan into action and hide the drugs and needle in his sling.

However, Ai would be very, very upset. But Aqua had the perfect plan for that. It won't be his fault he caused a bunch of chaos, he ensured he had a good excuse that a non-medical professional like Ai would believe.

After getting looked at by the doctor, who confirmed that he was beginning to heal and noted that his young age helped speed up the process, everyone was now being escorted away from the hospital

room and back towards the waiting room. It was time to put his plan into action.

"Tag!" Aqua yelled as he pushed Ruby over.

"Ouch!" Ruby cried out as she fell over. "Why'd you do that!?" She yelled.

"Aqua-Chan!" Ai reprimanded him but it was too late.

Aqua sprinted down away from the exit, despite Ai and Miyako yelling at him to get back there. A few nurses and doctors saw what was going on and started to try and grab him or stop him. Luckily, he was small enough to fit around the doctors and they were too slow to react.

Aqua felt really bad about causing an issue, he did have to deal with similar things in his old hospital, but he needed those drugs to save Ai. He'd get over his guilty feeling, he just hoped Ai would go easy on him with her punishment.

Aqua wasn't fast though, his short legs were a huge issue in speed. So, he found a rolling cart that was carrying various doctor tools, got under the tray, and used his foot to start pushing it while he rode on it.

He had to remind himself that he was an adult, because this was actually kind of fun. He enjoyed the mischief he was causing a little bit, and the fun of rolling on a cart. It was an almost child like experience he missed after he got older.

However, he had no time for fun. He had to find the pharmacy.

When he did, he crashed the cart into the desk, causing tools and instruments to fly all over the place. He jumped off at the last second so as to avoid getting hurt.

"Well... that's lucky." He said to himself.

There was a syringe on the ground, which was on the top of the cart. It was empty luckily and had its safety cover over the needle still, showing that it hadn't been used. He reached over and put it in his sling before anyone would notice.

He ran around the counter, ducking under the swinging gate and went over to the shelves. A nurse behind the counter was about to grab him, but he reacted faster.

He felt really bad for whoever had to reorganize the medicine, but Ai's life trumped a worker's inconvenience.

He grabbed the shelf and was barely able to use all the strength in one hand to pull it down, missing the nurse but causing her to get out of the way as the shelf full of pills and drugs fell over.

Luckily, medicinal bottles are made primarily of plastic and very durable, so they'd be fine. They would just have to reorganize them.

Aqua shifted through the pile and found what he was looking for. A very powerful Anesthetic that was still a liquid, meant to be injected during surgery to put a person under in order to avoid them experiencing pain. Normally, it was delivered through an IV, but can be injected with a syringe.

He put that in his sling and ran back out of the counter area. He had what he needed to he could allow himself to get caught-

"Come here!" Ai yelled as she grabbed his non-injured arm.

"Mama, that hurts." He tried to gain some sympathy... though it did actually hurt with how she was squeezing his arm.

"What are you thinking!?" She was very mad again. "You made a complete mess of the nice doctors stuff!"

"I eto..." He pretended to be confused. "I don't know." He said.

"Are you ok ma'am?" A nurse asked.

"Please forgive my son, I don't know what happened." Ai said, hoping her disguise would keep her hidden.

"Is he normally like that?" The nurse asked.

"No, he never once did this before." She said.

"Mama, I feel tired." He said.

It actually wasn't a lie. The pain killers that he took cause drowsiness, and he was feeling tired after the sprint he just did. He actually felt exhausted and about to fall asleep.

"Did he take any medication recently?" The nurse asked.

"He had some pain killers." Ai said as she held up the bottle.

"That's weird, it shouldn't explain his outburst, but I think he may have had a bad reaction to it." She said.

"Is he ok!?" Ai asked in concern, all anger gone the instant she felt Aqua was in danger.

Aqua smiled to himself. Even though there were predictable side effects, sometimes people can react to medication in unpredictable ways. His behavior can be chalked up to a severe reaction to the medication, especially since as a child, he would have difficulty controlling the reaction.

"He should be fine; this is a very mild drug for his age." The nurse explained.

"So, he did that because of a bad reaction?" Ai asked.

Aqua could tell that the nurse was confused about this situation. She knew that even though bad reactions can be rare, they wouldn't fully explain a sudden outburst like his. However, she couldn't exactly discount that idea either.

"If this is the first time he displayed that behavior, it is possible it was the drug." The nurse said, finding no other reason why he would react that way.

"Does he need to be seen?" Ai asked.

"No, he should be fine." The nurse said. "But if he experiences any chest pains or unusual symptoms, please come back immediately."

"Of course." Ai bowed. "Please forgive his behavior."

"It's ok." The nurse smiled. "There was no trouble."

Aqua couldn't help but snicker. He remembered his old nurses complain. They had to be respectful to patients, but Aqua knew she was going to complain to the other nurses the moment they left. It made him miss working in a hospital.

"Come here baby." Ai said as she picked him up and walked to the hospital. "Are you ok? Do you feel funny?"

"I'm tired." Aqua put his head on her shoulder, feeling tired from the little episode.

"Don't worry, rest now. Mama his here and she'll take care of you." She rubbed his back.

Ai was so worried about him. Her anger immediately dropped because of the reaction. She knew that this was unusual behavior for Aqua, so it must have been the medicine. Plus, she didn't want to punish or frighten him since it could make problems worse.

She'd forgive him since it wasn't his fault. Though, she needed to call their doctor and get a different prescription.

Now that the episode was implied to have been caused by the medicine and outside of his control, Ai was no longer mad at him. At least, she was understanding that he had very little control of the situation.

"We'll get you different medication, so you won't have a bad reaction to it." She said. "Mama loves you Aqua-Chan." She said, using third person baby talk.

"Aqua loves Ai-Chan too." He said, imitating her talk.

"My little brat." She giggled as she rubbed his back.

The medicine was hitting him hard, Aqua was falling asl-

"Good to see you Miyuki." Eren said as Miyuki entered into the room.

"I can't say the same to be honest." He replied. "Especially him." He pointed to Sergei.

Sergei just shrugged, understanding but also not really caring.

"Sergei is going to start training you on how to act more like a criminal." Eren said.

"Why not you?" He asked.

"Like I said, I'm not a good criminal." Eren said.

"But you took down a lot of guys by yourself." Miyuki said.

"And because of that, I put Ai in more danger." Eren said. "Besides, A month ago I was more of a Soldier than anything else."

"Alright, so what do I need to learn?" Miyuki asked. "Do you want me to learn to fight or something?"

"No." Sergei said. "That won't be necessary."

"Ok, but don't all criminals use guns?" He asked.

"Some do, some don't. But anyone can use a gun." He said. "What you will learn is how to talk like criminal and act like criminal. First

off, you need new clothes so I will get for you."

"Ok." Miyuki said. "What kind?"

"You won't be able to look like important Yakuza, but we'll make you look like newer kid from streets. Especially at your age." Sergei said.

"Should I spike my hair like an RPG character?" He asked.

Eren raised his eyebrow, wondering what Ar-PeeGee meant in this context since he could tell it had nothing to do with the weapon he used, but he kept his mouth shut.

"Do you think this is Final Fantasy?" Sergei asked.

"I'm surprised you know what that is." He said.

"I've lived here since the nineties, I am familiar." He glared at Miyuki. "Honestly, I would suggest we shave your head bald."

"W-what?" Miyuki asked.

"But we also don't want to ruin your life too, so your family may have questions as to why you did that. Just keep hair the way it is" He said. "We should also give you tattoos."

"But that would make me look like a delinquent." Miyuki said. "I'd also get kicked out of the Academy."

"You're about to pretend to be Yakuza, you get caught you could go to jail." Sergei said.

"Yea, but if I get kicked out, so does my sister and that would basically ruin her chances of getting a decent job." He said.

"I threatened to cut your sister to pieces... so why would you think I'd care about her future?" Sergei asked.

Like, Sergei was legitimately confused. He would never harm an innocent young girl in any way, nor would he intentionally put a child in danger unless in very specific circumstances, like this. But Miyuki didn't know that. As far as he is concerned, Sergei intended to either sell or torture his sister.

"Oh, right..." Miyuki said, having at least the common sense to blush.

"You forgot...?" Sergei asked in disbelief.

"In my defense, I've never been around criminal before." He said.

"Rich girl is doomed." Sergei said facepalmed.

"She'll be fine." Eren said. "We'll get her to safety."

"Moving on." Sergei continued. "I don't intend to give you real tattoos. We'll use fake ones that can be peeled off. They won't look as convincing, but we'll put some wrap to imply it is brand new. You'll basically pose as a new guy."

"Ok, then I can peel them off." Miyuki said.

"Exactly, so we'll go over how you talk and act when working with gang members." Sergei said. "You'll need to convince them that you're moving the girl to another location, and to do that you can't be nervous."

"Ok, that should be easy." Miyuki said.

It was not easy, not at all for Miyuki. Every time he tried to imitate a situation that Sergei showed him, he'd either stutter or completely overact. Not only that, but he would keep forgetting what to say or was not able to easily retort any snips back at him.

He had to convince the guards around Kaguya that he was picking her up for transport, but he was completely unable to act with confidence or lie effectively. This made sense since his nerves were

getting to him, and Sergei knew that it was going to get worse from here on out.

"He's hopeless." Sergei said.

"His main problem is he can't talk or come up with excuses." Eren said. "His confidence is a bit better though."

"If we want him to say right things, we'll need to give him a wire."

"A what?" Eren asked.

"I'll give him a little earpiece and he'll be able to listen to me over radio and I can hear around him. I'll talk for him and tell him what to say, that's our best bet."

"If you're sure." Eren said. "It'll at least only make him focus on his confidence."

"Honestly, I am normally very confident." Miyuki tried to say.

"You're bragging right now?" Sergei asked.

"I just never had to prepare for meeting criminals, ok?" He tried to defend.

"It doesn't matter." Eren said. "We'll go with that plan if we need to."

"Ok, seems easy I guess." Miyuki said optimistically. "So why will they let her go after this Saturday?" He asked.

"They're doing an attack on the Nakano-Kai in Ginza." Eren said. "I'll be taking part."

"Wait, are you attacking innocent people?" He asked.

"No." Eren said. "In fact, Yoshida is ordering us to avoid innocent people so we don't get the government involved."

"So why do they need Shinomiya?" He asked.

"Because she'll be used as a false decoy to keep the police away from Ginza." He said. "Then when she's returned, she'll be planted with the information that the Nakano-Kai took her-"

"Basically, ensuring they're wiped out." Miyuki finished.

"All of it hinges on the Nakano-Kai being wiped out in this attack." Eren said. "If they aren't, Kaguya will remain a pawn in this war."

"I don't like it." Miyuki said, once again debating going to the police.

"This'll be the best way to save her, is if we just play by the rules for now and hope Yoshida lets her go." Eren said. "If not, we get her our way."

"Speaking of that, you'll need new gun." Sergei said.

"Sure." Eren said.

Sergei handed Eren another Marleyan pistol, this one just as decorative and engraved as his previous one, to include the ivory handle. Eren took it and looked over it. He could tell it was older, very old, but still in good condition.

"That's an original engraved C-96 Mauser pistol, produced 1916 for a high-ranking German Officer in World War One." He said. "It's going rate on market can easily get in the tens of thousands."

"Why give it to me?" Eren asked.

"It's fitting, you already made name for yourself with old one. Plus, it has long history." He said. "I only ask that you give it back when you're done, I can sell it as the Akuma No Ko's pistol as a collectors item in the criminal underworld."

"Sure." Eren shrugged.

"You'll need new ammo though, 7.63 Mauser, so it'll be a little more expensive. But I'll foot the bill since you'll help triple that guns worth." He said.

"Sure." Eren shrugged.

"Also, Yoshida said he wants his lieutenant to be a bit more groomed for the attack." He said. "I have a few options for the battle, though I recommend this style."

Sergei told Miyuki to stay in the main room of the warehouse while Sergei took Eren to a back room that had a bunch of suits for most occasions. Eren only ever wore a suit when he visited Marley, so he was a bit unfamiliar with them. He decided to let Sergei pick.

Sergei had Eren try on a black well-made suit with shiny black shoes. The jacket was a two-button type jacket and he recommended that Eren only button the top one. Under the jacket, instead of a dress shirt, Eren wore an expensive black turtle neck sweater that almost blended into the dark color of the suit.

"Looks fitting." Sergei said.

Eren looked at a few more things and saw a black flat brimmed hat with a feather sticking out from the side of the expensive looking band. It looked similar to the brimmed hats some of his comrades wore when they were in Marley. Eren tried it on.

"A fedora?" Sergei asked. "Now you look like western 1920s gangster." He laughed. "Though, it is fitting."

"I need some way to hide my identity." Eren said. "What about these as well?"

Eren took a pair of glasses that had a dark opaque lens. The rim was entirely round and would help to hide his identity.

"Now you look German." Sergei said.

"People kept calling me German." Eren smirked to himself. "So why not?"

"It's fine, it will keep identity hidden." Sergei said. "Though you will clearly be making a calling card with both the gun and that style."

"We both know I'm past that." Eren said. "Everyone knows that there's a foreigner called the Akuma No Ko." He said.

"I won't fault the style." Sergei laughed. "It is unique and fits. Especially with the gun. You look less like street kid and more like professional."

"This is only until Ai is safe from Mao." Eren said. "Once she is, Yoshida will leave her alone and I will leave."

"You think he will, after how much you've proven yourself?"

"He will, or he'll learn what kind of devil I can be." Eren said.

"I've doubted your abilities before and looked foolish." Sergei chuckled. "I think you don't understand though, you're in this game for life. No one leaves Yoshida if they've interested him."

"I'll do what I can to protect Ai." Eren said.

"You still intend to propose?" Sergei asked.

"Why not?" Eren asked. "We're already basically living together. I've been staying at her home longer than my own lately."

"I just mean, it is a bit rushed for your generation." He said.

"Rushed?" Eren asked.

"This generation moves slower than mine." He said. "I grew up in rural town outside of Vladivostok. The further from city, the more traditional it was. Especially so far from Moscow. While I didn't live in the time of Stalin, growing up in old Soviet Union was difficult. So

many people married quick, if their parents didn't already arrange for it."

"I'm aware Sergei." Eren said. "My home is the same."

"I'm just saying, this country and generation can be different." Sergei said. "Western influence makes couples last longer before marriage. So don't get upset if maybe single mom is surprised. Though you know her better than I do, so I guess you know what you're doing."

Last longer? Eren figured his and Ai's relationship has already lasted a long time without marriage. She always insisted that he rest at her home, so he was sure she was wanting him to propose. Men and women didn't live under the same roof together.

The only exceptions of course, was either the military, blood related, or necessity born from desperation. However, Ai was none of those things. She constantly invited Eren to stay in her home and Eren was wondering if she was going to propose to him.

Courtship in the walls was simple. If a man and a woman were compatible, they married after getting parental permission. Obviously, the last part wouldn't happen for them. Love wasn't as much of a priority. It was less about how you felt about your spouse and more about what the two can do to raise and support children.

Love typically happened after marriage. Eren knew his own parents loved each other and fell in love fast. Eren also knew that he loved Mikasa, though his own pride and obsession prevented that.

Eren cared for Ai, though he couldn't say he fully loved her. Not yet. But he knew that she was a good woman who he wanted to be with. It's not like there was a way to be with a woman without marrying her. It was expected, even in Marley marriages were fast.

So, Japan should be the same. Marriage was just universal in how it was done.

"Thanks Sergei." Eren said. "But my mind is made up. I can't say I love Ai yet, but I know she is a good woman. I'll protect her and make sure she and her children are provided for."

"Very old way of thinking." Sergei chuckled. "Please record when you propose."

"Why?" Eren asked.

"I honestly want to see how funny it will be." He chuckled.

Eren shook his head and walked away, changing back into his regular clothes.

"Yes, I'm calling about changing the prescription for my sons pain medication." Ai said over the phone. "Yes, Hoshino Ai." She said, hoping she didn't recognize the name.

When she got home, she immediately wanted to get the prescription changed since Aqua reacted negatively to it. Since this was a medical thing, she had to give her real information to the pharmacy as his real mother and had to get it herself. Miyako couldn't cover for them since this was official documentation.

While she was doing that, Ruby and Aqua were in her room talking.

"So, want to explain what that was all about?" Ruby asked.

"Sorry, it was the medication." He lied.

"Look, you've been acting weird lately." Ruby said.

"Have I?" He asked.

"Yea." Ruby said as she crossed her little arms to look more threatening. "First you run away, then you fight some Yakuza guy. Now, you make a mess of the hospital? What's going on Aqua?"

"Nothing." He said. "I just wanted to experience being a kid again."
He lied.

"Liar!" She said. "Seriously, what is going on!"

"Keep your voice down." He tried to shush her.

"Why won't you tell me or mama what's going on?" She asked.

Why? Because they're both so young. Ruby died when she was young, he knew that. He refused to involve her or Ai in this because of how much he cared for both of them. Ai was sixteen when he treated her, and he fell in love with her then. Not as a romantic partner, but more as a daughter.

He had to keep her safe. Even though Ruby was reborn, at least she could act like the child Ai deserved. She was young enough where it was easy for her to act like a toddler. He always despised being reborn and robbing Ai of a child.

So, he couldn't involve Ruby or Ai. He loved them both and always swore he'd protect them.

"I just can't." Aqua said.

"Why?" She asked.

"Because."

"That's a dumb reason."

"It's a good enough reason for an adult." He said.

"But you're not an adult. You're four, like me."

"I wasn't always Ruby." He said. "And I won't say anything to you because I don't want to."

"So, you'll keep getting hurt? Is that it?" Ruby asked.

"If it keeps you and Ai safe, sure." He said. "Besides, that was one time on stage. He was going to kill her, and the hospital was just a bad reaction. I'm not doing anything on purpose."

"You're talking in circles." Ruby said.

Was he? He didn't realize. He was starting to get emotional and had to calm himself.

"Look Ruby, I'm sorry." He said honestly. "Besides, it's more important that Ai stays safe-Ow!"

Ruby lightly hit him in his bad arm, on the upper arm, away from the stab wound. There was no risk of hurting him, though it did sting.

"You're stupid!" She said. "What about you staying safe? What about you being ok? Do you think mama and I would be happy if you got hurt again? What if next time you lose an arm? Or you don't get helped fast enough and die? Do you think we'll be ok?"

"And then you do stupid stuff, like run away or make a mess of the hospital. Don't you think I was worried too? Don't you think I was upset when I found out my brother was missing?"

She was right. Ruby only ever showed affection for Ai, so he sometimes forgets that, technically, they were brother and sister. They were supposed to care for each other. Even if they were reborn, they were still family. At least, as much of a family as they could be.

At least if there is one thing they could share with each other, it was being reborn.

"I'm sorry." Aqua looked down.

"Huh?" Ruby asked.

"You're right." Aqua said. "I'm being selfish and being reckless. I'm sorry."

"W-well-" She stuttered.

"I promise Ruby, I will try to be safer and won't be stupid." His heart actually hurt when he said that lie. "I'll be careful, I promise."

He would be careful, after he dealt with Hikaru. After Hikaru was gone, and Ai and Ruby were safe, he'll promise to never even do a sport in order to stay safe. He'll honor that promise later.

After they were safe.

"O-ok." Ruby turned around. "Just stop doing stupid things. I don't care, but mama will." She crossed her arms again and hmphed.

"Really?" He asked. "Do you have to act like a Tsundere?"

"I am not." She said. "Don't go start overthinking it and developing a sister complex."

The only one developing a complex is you, he thought to himself.

"I'm going to mama." She ran out the room and over to Ai, who was done on the phone.

"Kids, dinner is rea-Ruby-Chan, why the sudden hug?" She asked as she knelt down to hug her daughter.

"Aqua's being a jerk." She tattled on him.

"Aqua-Chan." Ai glared at him.

"She's lying." He lied.

"Get along you two, before I have to get angry." She made a mad face at them, though broke it and giggled.

"Right." He raised his eyebrow.

"As punishment, you get to put the plates on the table." She said, giving him a small task that he can do with one arm.

"Sure." He shrugged.

After setting the plates down, Ai brought out their meals. It was boiled pork ramen that she made from scratch from ingredients she bought at the store. She preferred homemade ramen over microwaved ones, since she read somewhere that microwavable food gives you cancer. She didn't know if it was true but wanted them to be healthy.

"Hey mama, is Eren-San coming over?" Ruby asked.

"He said he will after work." Ai said.

"I can't wait, can we practice English together?" Ruby asked.

"Sure, we will." Ai said.

"Hey mama, when are you going on a date with him?" Ruby asked innocently.

Ai almost choked on her food as it went down the wrong pipe, completely taken by surprise that her daughter suggested that they date.

"D-date?" Ai asked. "What makes you think that?"

"Yea, you two spend a lot of time together." Aqua said.

"Well, we're neighbors." Ai said, not wanting to admit her feelings outloud to her children, especially since Ruby can't keep her mouth shut.

"Are you and Eren-San going to get married?" Ruby asked innocently.

"No!" Ai denied.

"Yea, seriously?" Aqua asked Ruby. "They haven't even dated yet, what makes you think they'll get married after knowing each other for a few weeks?"

"Well, if they love each other, it shouldn't matter how long they dated." Ruby said.

Ai squealed on the inside. Her baby girl was so cute and innocent. She had no idea how real relationships worked.

"Sweety, Ren-San and I aren't getting married." She giggled. "But next week, I am going to tell him something very special."

"Really?" Ruby got excited. "What?"

"It's a secret for now." Ai held up her finger to her lips and winked at Ruby. "So don't tell anyone, ok?"

"I can't wait to hear it mama." She smiled.

"You too Aqua, no leaking top secret information." Ai joked.

Top secret? Really? Aqua knew she was going to confess her feelings to Eren and ask him on a real date. Aqua had no doubt Eren would at least try to date her, whether or not it lasted was up to them. He could imagine them loving each other, but he's been in enough relationships to know that they don't always last.

Still, he hoped that they would find happiness. Eren was a good man, and he could imagine them getting married in a year or two.

"Sure Ai." He shrugged.

"What if he tries to marry you mama?" Ruby asked.

Ai giggled, knowing that would never happen. That would be way too sudden and way too soon. Though, she did decide to placate Ruby's innocent childhood fantasy.

"Then of course I'd say yes." Ai joked.

Could Ai see herself marrying Eren? Maybe one day. She'd say, maybe a year of dating. Six months at the absolute earliest, though that would still be a bit fast.

But first hurdle was admitting she had feelings for him and moving on from there. She wanted to take things slow so they can truly fall in love one day.

Yea, everyone commenting that Eren is going too fast, that's kind of the idea lol. I'm glad everyone agreed it was too fast. I'd be worried if you guys got excited for it to move that fast lol.

AoT never showed what dating was actually like. If it's similar to renaissance styled society, dating wasn't a thing and marriages happened fast. Marriage was less about being in love and more about what people can do for each other and for their eventual kids. It was more business than love. So, as with everything else, that'll be a huge culture shock for Eren.

Even Sergei was from an older time. Rural areas half a century ago were very old fashioned. Even in places like South Korea in the 1970s, people usually married after their first kiss.

Dating is still a relatively modern thing and in places like Japan, it's newer than the west. Even in Japan in the 1970s people got married faster than today. Though now, Japan basically caught up in western dating culture, though maintaining some traditional things.

So, yea, as with everything else so far, Eren is in for another culture shock lol.

Also, I promise that Eren's new look is not based off of John Wick. I promise I had this idea before I saw the movies lol.

I'll admit, I was a little disappointed with how I wrote Ruby and Aqua talking, but I wanted to just try it. I was getting a bit into a writer's block with that but needed to start getting Ruby more screen time. She has been pushed a bit to the back, but it's to be expected since she is just a side character. Eren and Aqua are the main characters here, so they obviously get the most screen time lol. So, hope it doesn't come off as an out of nowhere scene.

Anyway, hope you all enjoyed the chapter. Next will be the Ginza attack.

The Ginza Strip Attack

Chapter 32: The Ginza Strip Attack

Eren had some trouble seeing through the dark tinted glasses in the Saturday night of Ginza, but it was important in order to hide his identity.

Yoshida had one last meeting before the big attack, mostly to go over slight changes to the attack since the Nakano-Kai new they were coming. Yoshida wasn't concerned since they significantly outnumbered the Nakano-Kai, but he was being cautious.

Most of the jobs had little to no changes. Whether they were prepared or not didn't matter. They were still going to overwhelm them. The only major change was Eren's job, which he was instructed to do something different at the restaurant.

Originally, Eren was going to assassinate the heads of the gang and completely destroy their command and control, allowing stragglers to be picked off after Kaguya was returned. However, since they knew they were coming, the location wasn't going to have the meeting anymore. At least, that was the prediction.

Yoshida assumed that now, the restaurant would be a trap for any groups going in. He was putting Eren in charge of the attack since he was sure that Mao would be there to bait Yoshida. However, Yoshida trusted that Eren would be able to survive and win.

Unlike the last time Eren was in a trap, Yoshida made him aware of it. Eren didn't mind walking into a trap, as long as he wasn't blindsided by it. His new mission was to act on the bait and neutralize the trap. Since Mao would use himself as bait, it gave Eren an opportunity to kill him.

"Sixteen members of your cell will be waiting in the kitchen for the attack." Raido informed him as he made his way through the back door in the alley behind the restaurant.

Eren adjusted his suit, the turtleneck sweater providing a bit of warmth in the cool night air. His pistol was tucked into his waistline since a Marleyan pistol holster added too much bulk to the suit. The suit was too form fitting for anything big.

"There are an additional five snipers on the roof across the street, ready to kill anyone leaving that are identified as Yakuza members."

Eren asked Sergei what a sniper was. Basically, a sharpshooter that can hit more accurately and target people much easier, at least in the context of a street environment.

"How will they distinguish civilians with Yakuza?" Eren asked.

"Yea, once fighting starts, a lot of people will go running. That's why these are some of our best members. A lot were former JSDF Special Forces and Special Assault Team Police, so they're well trained." Raido said.

"I'll take your word for it." Eren said since he didn't understand those words in this context.

Eren walked to the kitchen, where a few other well-dressed Yakuza members were waiting with their own pistols. Unlike Eren, their pistols were more modern and had hollow point ammo, which Sergei explained reduced penetration so that they could reduce the chance of civilian casualties. They nodded as Eren walked by, giving respect to their new Lieutenant.

Eren walked up to one of the well-dressed men, though Eren knew that he wasn't a Yakuza member.

"You're the Akuma No Ko?" He asked in near fluent Eldian.

The man looked at him with a raised eyebrow, almost as if he recognized Eren. Eren felt that it was impossible since he never met the man before, but he still got worried.

"You're Yuto?" Eren asked.

"Yes, Yoshida contacted me through a proxy and let me know about what's going on." He said. "I have no interest in a Yakuza quarrel, but this Nakano gang has been strong arming me. I want no part in it, but I will let you have access through my restaurant."

"We'll handle it." Eren said.

"Mao is sitting in the center table, alone. He only had tea and I feel like he's waiting for you." He said.

"Alone?" Eren asked, knowing that it was far too dangerous.

"Yes." Yuto said. "I don't like the feeling."

"Neither do I." Eren said.

Eren couldn't take a shot at Mao if he was in the center. It was a Saturday night, which Yoshida said was the busiest time of the day. Even with hollow points, over penetration was still possible. Especially since Eren didn't have hollow points in his Marleyan pistol.

"I'll take him." Eren said to the others. "If you hear more than my pistol shooting, we're compromised. Rush in but watch your aim and don't kill civilians."

"Understood." The men said.

Eren walked out onto the main floor, amazed at how many decorations and people there were. All kinds of older and, to him, foreign looking things were all around. The place was completely packed, not a single chair was empty. Eren guessed there were maybe one or two hundred people here.

It was a calculated risk. Mao always used the large numbers to hide his meetings, while Yoshida hoped that the extra people would make it easier for an assassin to reach them unnoticed. It had benefits and drawbacks for both sides.

Eren saw Mao sitting alone at a table, dressed in a full black suit, a weird black vest that was bulky, white shirt, and red tie. He was sipping on some hot tea, his back to Eren.

It was too easy, way too easy. Eren looked around, there were upper floor balconies that had more seating, which means there could be a chance that there could be snipers or gunman up there. Even then, gunmen can be hidden in the crowd. Eren expected to be shot at any moment, but as he got closer, nothing happened.

He only needed a few shots to ensure that he was dead. Even if Eren got shot, ensuring Mao was dead would save Kaguya and Ai both. Even if he got injured or killed. It was risky, way too risky, but it was too perfect not to take.

It reminded him of the battle at Shinganshina. Things were too perfect there as well. They knew there was a trap but couldn't stop just because it was there. They had to continue the operation, knowing that an attack was nearby.

Right as Eren approached, Mao turns his head and smiled when he saw Eren. He knew Eren was approaching, likely someone in the building watching over. It wouldn't matter once Eren was close enough though.

Mao smirked and took out a pistol from his coat, Eren prepared himself for a quick draw, so he reached for his own pistol in his waistband. Everything happened in slow motion and Eren was prepared to attempt to shoot from this distance and avoid injuring people.

However, Mao instead raised his pistol into the air, aiming directly up and not even attempting to aim at Eren.

BANG! BANG! BANG!

Three consecutive shots rang out as Mao fired blindly into the air. There was a moment of silence before the panic kicked in.

Suddenly, the entire area was filled with the sounds of screaming, chairs moving, and feet stomping as people got out of their seats to escape to the entrance. Eren was pushed over as people made their way to the exit, completely swallowed up by the crowd and blocking Mao from his vision.

Eren heard shifting right behind him and tried to turn around. There was a gunman, dressed like a normal civilian, about to point his pistol at Eren.

Eren realized that the Nakano-Kai gangsters were imbedded in the crowd as regular people, making it so that when Mao created panic, they would rush out from their spots and attack anyone nearby.

"Damn!" Eren said over the screaming as he put out his arm and deflected the man's gun upwards.

BANG!

The gun went off in a safe direction, but Eren knew he needed to kill him quick. Eren twisted his arm to make him drop the gun, took his pistol, and shot the man right in the foot. This caused the man to fall over, letting Eren shoot him in the head while he was on the ground. The bullet penetrated both times and imbedded itself into the floor.

He was at a disadvantage since he had to avoid casualties. He needed to rush back towards the main counter, away from the panicking crowd.

Another man rushed him in the crowd, carrying a knife and swiping at Eren. Eren ducked under the swing and from his crouched position, fired directly up into the man's jaw, killing him instantly and letting the bullet hit the roof.

Eren continued this over and over, avoiding as much of the crowd as possible while pushing towards the counter and bar in the back.

A few times, he'd get jumped in the crowd but would either get in a position where his bullet went over the crowd or down into the ground, avoiding any injuries. He heard gunfire in the back, which let him know that his men were already running into the main area and taking shots, being careful not to hurt any innocents.

Eren reached the bar and hopped over it, sliding so he can get behind and took cover. Other members of his own gang were there, taking cover and looking over the counter to see if they could get a shot off. One man was shot when he did, falling dead on the floor near Eren.

"We're getting hit from in the crowd, wait for it to die down then fight!" Eren said, knowing that in a minute or two, any innocent person would rush outside, leaving only the Nakano-Kai gangsters.

Eren adjusted his glasses so they would stay on and waited for the sounds of creaming people to die down before he poked his head over the counter.

Suddenly, he heard bullets go over his head and into the bar, causing shrapnel and splinters to hit him and his men from behind the counter. Eren got on the ground as low as possible in order to avoid the rounds that easily penetrated the bar. Glass and spilled alcohol got on him, ruining his suit, though he didn't care.

Eren got into a crouch and ran along the bar, hoping he didn't get hit from a stray bullet as glass and splinters exploded around him. He rushed over to an opening in the counter and peaked his head around the corner.

He saw a few tables get turned on their side. It wouldn't protect him, but he could use it to conceal his movement. He also noticed a few Nakano-Kai gunmen in the center of the main area, knocking tables over to create barricades and hiding spots for them to duck behind.

Eren rushed from one collapsed table to the other, getting close enough to where he could flank them from the side. By this point, no people were near them and he didn't have to worry about his aim. Eren pointed his pistol and started firing.

The improvised barricades gave no cover as his bullets tore through the tables and hit the men behind them. The men turned to try and react, but most were either killed or injured from Eren's flanking move.

One man rushed Eren, who used all ten of his rounds and was unable to reload before he closed the distance.

Eren looked at the wall behind him and grabbed two of the displayed Hizuru guardless sabers that he saw on the wall. He dropped his pistol and grabbed two of them, dual wielding them and attacked the man charging him. He stepped to the side, letting the man rush past him, and with a quick movement, swung both swords right at the man's nape, killing him instantly.

The strange, guardless sabers had a similar weight distribution to his ODM blades, but it wasn't as sharp as the blades and didn't break if too much force was applied. This made the cut hit his hands harder than he was used to, but he compensated.

Eren dropped the left saber and grabbed his pistol, quickly reloading it before making sure it was ready to fire again.

Eren rushed out from cover, shooting at the men in the center and rushing towards them to close the distance. When he reached the group, he used the guardless saber to cut the men to pieces, being thrown a bit off balance by using one instead of two.

He heard a man rushing from behind and saw one Nakano-Kai member grab a large, studded club from the wall and charging Eren. Eren saw just in time to duck under the swing before stabbing upwards with the saber, going through the man's jaw and killing him.

Eren looked around to see if there were anymore, but there was none. All the members were either killed by Eren or gunshots from the men behind the bar.

"Very nice!" He heard from the second floor area.

Eren looked up and saw Mao clapping his hands, looking down on Eren.

"I loved it, hell of a fight down there! Never expected you to use a freaking Katana!" He laughed.

Eren took his pistol and aimed straight at the man's heart.

BANG!

"Itai!" He yelled as he went down.

Well, that should do it, he hit the heart. There was no way anyone short of Titan powers could survive that.

"I thought these weren't supposed to hurt." He said as he stood up, holding his chest. "Feels like I got punched in the chest." He laughed.

What?

"Ceramic Level III plates, amazing body armor." He laughed, showing under his jacket was a piece of black armor. "These suckers will stop an AK round."

Eren dropped the sword and started shooting at Mao, who stepped back so he was no longer visible from the balcony. Once Eren ran out, Mao started talking again, though not revealing himself. So, this world has armor that stops gun? That's new.

"So, how's your ambush working!?" Mao asked. "Seems like you successfully stopped mine!"

"Come down here and end it!" Eren yelled up, tired of these dumb games.

"We both know I can't beat you in a fair fight!" He laughed. "So, I'll stay here!"

"You intend to just keep running!? You know you can't beat Yoshida's gang!" Eren called up.

"It's not about winning kid, it's about having fun!" He called down. "Besides, does the old man really think that a thousand guys are going to just take us out!?"

Eren knew Mao had a plan, there was no way he didn't. But what did he intend to do?

Mao was cornered. Even if he ran out onto the street, snipers would take him out. If he tried to come down here, Eren would kill him. Maybe through a window, but that would rely on luck more than anything.

"Here's a little treat for you, this restaurant was recently renovated by a company we strong armed!" He called down. "So was all our other businesses and safe houses! Apparently, explosives under the floorboards isn't covered as a JISHA violation!"

Shit.

"Run!" He yelled to his guys as he took off towards the main door, hoping to escape the explosion he knew was coming.

Mao was going to blow up the restaurant and take Eren out. Eren hoped that he could reach safety before it went off.

BOOM!

Eren dove through the door, sliding on the street as the force of the explosion pushed him forward into the street. Civilians were

panicking and running away, as well as cars driving by at high speeds to escape the chaos.

Eren saw a van drive towards him and rolled out of the way, trying to avoid getting run over. He rolled towards the now burning restaurant and stood up, only to be jumped by a gunman who was in the van.

He tried to hit Eren, but Eren quickly grabbed his arm and got him into a standing arm bar. He saw other gunman in the van aim and getting ready to shoot. Eren turned the gunman in his arms, so he was being used as a human shield.

A series of gunshots went off and Eren felt some of them go through the gunman and into him. Sergei warned him that although hollow point had less penetration, it could still go through a body.

Eren felt three impacts in his chest and abdomen before diving back behind the fav, away from the side door that they men opened in the van. He left the Yakuza gunman to bleed on the ground from the friendly fire.

He saw Mao run out of the building, likely safe from the explosion since he was on the upper floor and climbed down. He entered into the van but glanced at Eren before going fully in.

"Let the old man know that this was the only place I had my guys tonight!" He yelled over the sound of panicking people. "He'll learn that every place he was hitting only had explosives! Let's see how he'll do with half his gang wiped out!"

Eren took out his gun and tried to fire at him, but Mao got inside the van before he could line up a shot. It seems that van was made of similar materials to that vest since his bullets didn't get through. The van drove away, the snipers now able to react and try to shoot at the van but it was too late.

Eren opened his jacket fully to look at the damage. His sweater had some blood, though it was hard to see from the dark color of the

jacket. Luckily, he guessed that the hollow point bullets slowed down enough to not penetrate deep. He doubted that it even got through his muscle layer under his skin.

He picked at the wound a bit, pulling off a sliver of broken bone, which he assumed was from his Yakuza meat shield.

"Damn it." Eren said to himself.

"Are you ok?" He heard near him.

Eren looked over to see Yuto, the owner of the restaurant. He walked over and kneeled next to Eren to see if he was ok.

"I'm fine, what about you?" He asked.

"I heard the explosion from my kitchen, lucky, no one was hurt back there."

"Good to hear." Eren said as he attempted to stand up.

"Careful, let's get you in the back." He said, helping to lift Eren.

"Sorry about your business." Eren said.

"I'll be ok." Yuto said. "I have insurance for it, so I won't be affected by the renovations. I just wish you could have gotten the rest of those Nakano bastards."

"It seems like Yoshida's plan was a failure, and a loss if anything." Eren said.

Yuto got him into the kitchen area, which luckily was unaffected by the relatively minor explosions from the main floor. He sat Eren down on a counter and went to a first aid kit to help Eren.

"I'm glad to see you're ok though." He said.

"Why help me?" Eren asked. "I assumed you'd hate Yoshida as well."

"Don't get me wrong, I have no care for Yakuza gangs." He said. "But the Nakano-Kai threatened my wife's safety, so I'm working with Yoshida to protect her."

Eren almost chuckled at that. Seems him and Yuto were similar in that regard, both protecting women important to them.

"Lift up the sweater." He said.

Eren lifted it, showing the wounds in his torso.

"Luckily, it seems like the bullets didn't pierce deep, it stopped at the muscle layer. So as long as we prevent infection, you should be fine." He said.

"I've had worse." Eren said.

"I've noticed." Yuto said. "I saw the little fight you had on the concert stage."

Wait...

"You know?" Eren asked, worried that someone else knows his identity.

"That you were the man on stage and the Akuma No Ko?" He asked. "Yes, I do. I also know that you know Hoshino Ai."

"How?" Eren asked.

"Because Akuma No Ko's pistol was found in the crowd." He said. "I pieced it together when I saw you earlier, you have the exact same build and everything. Be thankful that no actual good footage of the Akuma No Ko exists, otherwise the police would put it together quick."

"So, you won't rat on me?" Eren asked.

"Actually, I'm grateful." He said.

"Why?" Eren asked.

"My wife is an idol from B-Komachi." He pulled a bullet out of Eren's torso, causing him to wince. "So, even though I don't like the idea of Ai being near you, I owe you for saving all the girls on the stage."

"He was only targeting Ai." Eren said.

"It doesn't matter, he could have gotten the others as well, but he never had the chance. And, there." He concluded, letting Eren lower his shirt.

"Thanks." Eren said. "Sorry about all those artifacts by the way."

"They can be replaced, like I said, my insurance covers it." He shrugged. "I was actually planning to hang one thing up, though I never got the chance."

"Maybe that can start when you fix the place up." Eren said.

"Yea, it's actually in a box here. I can't really figure out what it is. Maybe some kind of steam punk kind of weapon someone made in their garage." He shrugged. "Though, I should store them in my house for now."

Yuto went over to a box in the corner and opened it up. It was a large box, but Eren didn't care too much to see it. He needed to get away before any kind of law enforcement arrived. Even with the police being distracted with rumors on Kaguya, they were still around.

"I can't even begin to wonder how it works." He said, pulling out two straight swords.

"What the..." Eren gasped as he saw the weapons.

Those were ODM blades.

"I mean, the metal is very hard, I'm afraid I'd break them. Whoever made this doesn't understand heat treating." He said.

They were designed to be easily breakable, that way they didn't get stuck in titan flesh when you're going at speed.

"And this weird belt thing, seems to be some kind of fan."

"Can I see it?" Eren asked.

"Sure." He said.

Eren looked over the box and was amazed at what he saw.

It was ODM, that was for sure. It was an older model, similar to the ones he used in the Cadet Corp before getting newer and more reliable ones when he joined the Scouts. Eren instantly saw that it had all the main components, such as the tanks, eight blades, and the thruster in the back.

"Where did you get this?" Eren asked as he looked it over.

"Well, I got it maybe a month ago? I found it in an alley nearby, but it was weird. I figured I'd display it because whoever made it, clearly took inspiration from the steam punk genre."

"Can I have it?" Eren asked.

"Ah, a fellow collector?" He asked.

"Sure." Eren let him come to his own conclusions.

"Well, you did help me. I could part with it." Yuto said. "It is nice but doesn't mesh well with the historical look I have going."

"Thanks." Eren said.

Eren arrived around a month ago, meaning that it's possible this came with him. He doubted that it meant anyone from the battle of Shiganshina arriving since no one used an old model like this.

Eren glanced over and realized it was in a state of disrepair. The compartment that holds the gears and thruster was dented and damaged, and he saw a bit of rust on the inside. Not to mention it rattled, meaning some gears were either dislodged or damaged. If Eren wanted it working, he'd have to do some serious repairing.

That is, if it even had any gas to spare. If it's out of gas, it's useless since he doubted that this world had Ice Burst Stones.

"Take care Akuma No Ko." Yuto said. "And thanks again from saving my wife."

Eren nodded as he lifted the box over his head and went to the area where Sergei was at. The box was a bit heavy, but Eren was used to the weight of ODM gear.

In the distance, Eren heard explosions from the various safe houses and businesses that were now known to be traps. It was all somewhat distant, but it caused a massive amount of damage.

Eren got to Sergei's car and put the ODM gear in the back while he got into the front seat.

"Collecting now?" Sergei asked.

"Something like that." Eren said. "What the hell is going on?"

"Mao set Yoshida up." Sergei said. "There's nothing but chaos on the Ginza Strip. Unfortunately, the explosions are causing innocent people to get hurt. No way the Government is going to look past this."

"So, Mao does want complete chaos." Eren said.

"Yoshida is calling everyone to either halt in place or return to the safe houses. He wants the entire operation shut down before he loses more men." Sergei said.

"How many did we lose already?" Eren asked, fearing the worse.

"Five hundred so far, with more severely injured. The explosions at the other locations were much bigger than this one." Sergei explained.

"Where'd they get these explosives anyway?" Eren asked.

"I'm familiar with the explosions." Sergei said, thinking for a moment. "If I had to guess, I'd say that this, combined with their other weapons, are getting funneled through China."

"Is that relevant?" Eren asked.

"Everything I supply in bulk is Russian." Sergei said. "I can't say for sure where they're getting these from, but if it's China, that could mean that China is trying to destabilize Japan."

"So, what now?" Eren asked.

"For now, we'll take you home and away from this mess." He said. "Yoshida will start contacting his Lieutenants and Commanders when things die down, but this war is far from over. Almost no one on Mao's side died."

"I guess that implies that he's keeping Kaguya." Eren guessed.

"Especially with the large response being expected from the Government, he may not ever release her."

"Damn." Eren said.

Next Morning

"You two look so cute!" Ai screamed at her babies who were wearing their school uniforms.

"But you look cuter mama." Ruby said happily.

Ai smiled at her daughter.

Although they were a late entry, Ai was finally enrolling them into preschool. She was so excited to finally see her babies in school uniforms. She couldn't wait to see them in their older uniforms, like their high school ones.

Ai thought sadly for a moment of what this reminded her of. When Ryosuke attacked them, one fear she had was that she wouldn't get to see them in their uniforms one day. How she would die and not see them being super cute and sweet. It made her legitimately sad.

"I- eto- I mean I do look super cute!" Ruby yelled, misinterpreting Ai's sudden sadness with what she said.

"Yup!" Ai broke out of her sadness. "So much cuter than mama!" She hugged Ruby.

Ai quickly adjusted her hat to make sure it fit properly for tomorrow. She wanted to try on the uniforms before they had to go to school for the first time tomorrow, and she was making sure that they were an ok fit.

"Hold still and smile for mama." She said as Ai took out her phone to get a picture.

Ruby did a pose mimicking one of her idol poses, while Aqua stood in a neutral stance and offered a small smile. It was cute to see how different the twins were in how they acted.

"Ok, now get changed so we don't wrinkle them." Ai said.

"Can't you just iron them mama?" Ruby asked.

"Oh, so Ruby-Chan thinks mama is a maid and won't help mama?" Ai said sadly.

"No, no, no." Ruby denied, swinging her hands around. "I'll iron it mama, you can rest."

Ai giggled at her daughter, who was sometimes too easy to tease.

"It's ok Ruby-Chan. The iron is too hot, let mama handle it." She said.

"Ok." Ruby said.

As both her children turned towards the bedroom to take their turns to change, Ai reached out and wrapped her arms around both of them from behind, giving them both a gentle kiss on the tops of their heads.

"I love you." she said to her children.

"Love you too mama." Ruby said.

"Love you too Ai." Aqua said, sighing slightly at saying it for the third time this morning.

"Now go get changed." She gently pushed them towards the bedroom and bathroom.

Aqua took the bathroom to get changed and Ruby the bedroom. Her heart was starting to break at how much older they were getting. Soon, they'll no longer be small. Ai was very short, even for a Japanese woman, and she knew that if either of her children inherited their father's height, they would dwarf her.

She didn't want that to happen. She wanted them to stay tiny and cute forever. What if one day she's no longer able to kiss the top of their heads? She'd have to get a stool to do it. She had to cherish every single moment with them.

That meant that she had to increase her daily kissing amount so she doesn't lose opportunities.

Ai went over to the TV to check to see if there were any shows on. She wanted to make sure that there was an age-appropriate show on TV when her kids came out.

" Last night's attack on Ginza has left the city of Tokyo in a state of fear. " She saw on the news.

What?

" The attack on Ginza Strip by two opposing Yakuza groups have left many of the businesses destroyed and in disrepair. Many stores, businesses, and warehouses were bombed with eyewitness reports describing gunman in the area. Among the gunman, are reports of the Akuma No Ko who was responsible for bombing a restaurant in the Ginza Strip. "

Ai's heart stopped when she saw the location was the business owned by Meimei's husband. She was terrified that her husband was hurt.

" We have confirmed that most of the casualties have been Yakuza gunmen who were armed with pistols and military grade weapons. However, in the explosions, a number of bystanders were injured, however there were no casualties in the general public. Due to this, the Government is increasing police presence and will vote on whether or not to mobilize the Self Defense Force to bring order to Tokyo. "

" The public is criticizing the police for a lack of response during the busiest hours of Ginza, who were in another part of the city due to a tip off of the Shinomiya daughter. People are criticizing the police for prioritizing one girl over the wellbeing of the citizens of Tokyo, as well as calls for investigations into the Shinomiya conglomerate for corruption and influence of the Government. "

" The Police Chief had this response earlier this morning. "

The camera changed to the same police chief Ai saw before, giving his own speech.

" We are aware of allegations against the police and Shinomiya conglomerate, but I would like to say that these rumors are baseless. The police are treating this kidnapping as seriously as any other. We are doing what we can to bring a young girl to her family and will continue to do so. However, based on recent events, the Government has decided to increase police activity in the greater Kanto Region and is considering mobilizing the Self Defense Force. "

" We are fully committed in ending this increase in crime and will take any measure necessary in order to bring the perpetrators to justice. We ask all citizens to report any suspicious activities and please notify the police if they see anyone suspected of working with these Yakuza groups. Thank you for your time. "

Ai turned the TV off right as her children came into the room. She rushed past Ruby and into her bedroom to grab her phone. She had to make sure that Meimei and her husband were alright. She grabbed the phone and quickly called her friend and coworker.

"Meimei, are you ok?" Ai asked.

"Yea, you heard what happened?" She asked.

"I can't believe it." She said. "Is Yuto ok?"

"He's fine, a little happy that his insurance will hit, but he's ok." She breathed a sigh of relief.

"I can't believe this is happening." She said. "I never imagined that Tokyo would turn into a warzone."

"Yea, things are getting worse apparently." She said. "And the police are getting more involved and they're talking about bringing the SDF. I wonder what's going to happen."

"Just make sure you stay ok; I'd hate to hear if anything happened to you or Yuto." Ai said.

"Luckily, I heard about it from Yuto before it hit the news, so I didn't get worried." She sighed out of relief. "Let's talk about something else. Are the kids excited for pre-school?"

The conversation went happier as Ai talked about how excited she was for the kids schooling. Despite the increase in police activity, it was unlikely that schools or other businesses would be impacted. She was so glad to hear about that.

Ai continued to talk before hanging up the phone and rejoining the kids, having to yell at Aqua for watching the news while she wasn't in the main room.

She really needed to get a smart TV to block certain channels for him.

I promise that John Wick did not inspire this lol. I doubt anyone would believe me though lol.

A caveat, the ODM gear came on its own. No spoilers, but I don't want people thinking that another AoT character will be joining the cast. This is a Chekov gun moment for later lol.

Hope you guys enjoyed this one. Now things are ramping up even more and Eren is going to have to save Kaguya now that the plan went poorly. Yoshida got too overconfident, and Mao had explosives that he shouldn't realistically have.

And with the Police in force, it'll only get harder for the war.

Hope you guys enjoyed.

A Very Bold Confession

Chapter 33: A Very Bold Confession

Eren was a bit nervous about proposing to Ai. He thought about how he was going to do it and decided to just default to his father's memories. He saw glimpses of when he proposed to his mother, it was a very simple thing. He proposed right after his mother recovered from the plague that went around shortly after his father arrived in Paradis.

It was a very simple and easy proposal. His father simply asked and then a week later, he was a married man for the second time. Almost immediately after, Eren was conceived.

By some miracle, the memories he saw from his father did not include that particular moment. Something Eren was incredibly grateful for since the last thing he wanted to see is how he was conceived.

Then again, all the memories were selected by his future self, well, now past self, when he had full control of the founding Titan. So, he intentionally avoided sending those memories to himself.

So, it would be easy. He was fairly sure that Ai cared for him as well. Ai would most likely say yes, and then he can actually protect her easier. He did care for her and her children, though he was a bit unsure of if he really did love her.

However, love didn't matter in a marriage. She could give him a good home and he can protect her and her children. Marriage was a simple transaction between two compatible people and love would eventually come down the road.

At least, he believed it could.

Being a Sunday evening, she had to go to rehearsal with the kids accompanying her. Eren also came over since she wanted to use today to confess her feelings. Meimei was pushing her to confess today, so she recommended to do it when she was finishing up so she could use tomorrow to go on a date with him.

Since the kids were starting school, it was the best chance to get some alone time with Eren and enjoy a romantic dinner or movie with him. It was the perfect time to confess.

" *Ok, but how do I go about it?* " Ai asked Meimei, who was busy wiping her sweat off her neck.

" *It's not that complicated Ai.* " Meimei said. " *How'd you and Hikaru confess?* "

" *He just asked me.* " Ai said. " *I was flustered at the time, but he had a way about him that made it easy. I never had to confess to a boy before.* "

" *Just get him alone and just confess to him. It's that easy.* " She said. " *Say that you have feelings for him and want to date him. I know he feels the same for you.* "

" *But how do you know?* " Ai asked.

" *It's the way he acts around you.* " She said. " *Just trust me. He'll say yes.* "

" *Ok.* " Ai said, trying to calm her nerves. " *So, alone?* " She asked.

" *You can do it in front of us, but it'll be a bit more nerve racking.* " She advised. " *I'll bring the kids to Miyako-San's car, you do what you need to.* "

" *What about my car?* " Miyako asked.

" *Ai is going to confess.* " Meimei said.

" *Meimei!* " Ai said.

" *Seriously?* " President Saitou said. " *I really don't think it's a good idea.* "

" *We'll keep it secret boss.* " Meimei said. " *Don't worry, we kept my marriage a secret. So, Ai will be fine.* "

" *Yea, but I still am not comfortable with it.* " Saitou said.

" *Ichigo, enough with your fatherly worry.* " Miyako sighed. " *Let her do what she wants.* "

" *It's not fatherly worry.* " Everyone knew he was lying. " *What about my business?* "

" *The business you were thinking of quitting after Ai almost died?* " Meimei called him out on his lie.

" *I can fire you Meimei.* " Saitou threatened.

" *No, you can't.* " She giggled, knowing she won.

" *Freaking idols.* " Saitou just shook his head.

" *Calm down Ichigo.* " Miyako giggled.

The other girls went out into the hallway and left, leaving Miyako, Saitou, Meimei, and Ai alone to clean up some of the props they used. Ai let down her ponytail, sighing as the tension on her head was relieved and her messy hair was freed.

She also figured the messy look might impress Eren a little bit.

"How'd practice go?" Eren asked as he walked into the dance room.

Eren walked in with her kids, who all came inside to see her since she clearly finished up.

" *Pretty- Eto*, pretty good." Ai switched to English.

"You're getting better at noticing that." Eren laughed.

"I never give up." She stuck her tongue out at Eren.

" *How was practice mama?* " Ruby asked Ai as she ran up to her leg.

" *It was fun, though mama is so tired.* " Ai said sadly.

" *I know!* " Ruby said, jumping a bit so Ai had to pick her up to hug her.

" *Aw, mama feels so much better.* " Ai lied; her legs screamed at the sudden added weight after her practice.

"Well, we're going to go, right President?" Meimei said in English.

"Sure." He shrugged, knowing what was coming next.

" *You have to go with Meimei-San.* " Ai said to Ruby.

" *Why?* " Ruby pouted as Ai gently lowered her.

"Actually, I have something to say real quick Ai." Eren said, cutting her off.

"Eh?" Ai questioned, unsure of what he wanted to say.

"It's important." He said.

Meimei and Miyako widened their eyes, wondering if Eren was about to be the first one to confess. They hadn't even left the room yet, so they were still well within earshot, and they knew that Eren was aware of that.

Ai had a similar thought and blushed. Was Eren going to confess his feelings right here? While everyone was in the room? He was just going to come out and say it, putting himself in an embarrassing position like that?

How bold.

Ai felt herself blush even more. She fully admitted to herself that she had a type. That type was confident and brave men. Men who were able to do anything no matter how embarrassing it might seem or talk and carry themselves with confidence. While disingenuous, Hikaru had that confidence that attracted her.

If Eren was going to confess his feeling right in front of everyone here, Ai felt like she would just melt at the boldness. She would swoon over him so easily because of that level of confidence.

She would marry him on the spot if he did.

"I want you to marry me." Eren said.

"Eh?" Ai said in a quiet and weak voice.

"EH!?" She screamed.

She was being hyperbolic!

Saitou and Miyako just gaped at what Eren just said. He just said that in front of everyone, not a single care in how people thought about him. Just saying that he wanted to marry her, how fast did he think their relationship was going.

Meimei was not expecting that at all. She did not think he would just ask her to marry him. She guessed Eren had feeling for her and wouldn't be surprised if he ended up confessing first. But this was

way too fast. He just completely skipped all the steps in a relationship.

Aqua was just as confused. Did Eren really believe it was appropriate to propose in that way? There was no build up, no special occasion, not even a ring. Just a proposal with no set up.

"What's going on?" Ruby whispered in Aqua's ear, since she didn't catch what he said exactly.

"Eren just proposed to Ai..." He said in disbelief.

Ruby was the only one who looked happy at that revelation.

"I-et-" Ai tried to speak.

Ai ran away.

Ai decided to cut her losses and ran right past Eren, going through the door and into the hallway in order to escape from Eren's proposal. She shut the door behind her and ran a few meters away, leaning against the wall in order to fully process what he said to her.

Eren just proposed to Ai, no fear, no romance, not even a ring. Just a simple proposal that she wasn't expecting. What was she supposed to say? She didn't want to reject a proposal from him, but she also didn't feel like she was nearly ready to say yes. She'd like to maybe one day marry him in a year, when she comes to terms with her feelings. But it was too soon.

There are steps that need to be followed first! Dates, gifts, couple's clothes, that kind of stuff. How can he just propose without following the steps?

Oh no, she basically just rejected him. She realized that she just ran away, he must feel like she rejected him. She kind of did, at least the actual proposal. But she was fully willing to go on a date. So, she

didn't want him to think she completely rejected him, just wanting to not get married yet.

But why would he just propose like that? It made no sense to her. How was she supposed to think about him after that?

Wait, he is from a rural area, right? If he's from a rural area, that means that he probably was raised on more traditional values. He already had trouble understanding things like technology and other aspects of a more modern culture. What if his views on romance are more traditional as well?

It made sense, meaning that as far as he was concerned, she just completely rejected any kind of romantic relationship with him. She completely forgot that he was more traditional and from a rural place in Eastern Europe.

But what was she supposed to do? She can't marry him, not yet. Would he be ok with a modern dating culture? Ai knew that she could wait till after marriage for sex if he was that traditional. Ai only had sex once and didn't really enjoy it, so she had no issues waiting on that.

But would he be ok with dating? Would he find it disrespectful to his culture if she said she wanted to wait at least a year?

What was she going to do?

This was the second time Eren tried to confess his feelings to a woman, only to have her reject him. Granted, Mikasa was just too shy to admit her feelings, but there was no question with Ai.

She completely ran away and abandoned him with no answer. He assumed that was just a complete rejection. There was no way that she was interested in him if she would just run like that. At least now he knew where they stood.

Eren smiled and started to lightly laugh to himself. He realized that he would sometimes laugh at inappropriate moments, but he couldn't keep himself at laughing at the irony. Two Hizuru women completely rejected him.

Oh well. Her happiness trumped his. So even though she showed no interest in him, he swore to continue protecting her. He knew he cared for her, so even if she didn't feel the same, he'd be sure to protect her and her children.

"What the hell was that?" Meimei spoke up.

"I guess she rejected me." Eren said with a slight laugh.

"Well, no shit." She said. "You just decided to propose to her in front of everyone. I mean, what did you expect her to say?"

"I honestly expected her to say yes." Eren said honestly. "I guess I was wrong."

"Are you just intentionally stupid, or are you messing with Ai?" Meimei asked.

"What's that mean?" Eren narrowed his eyes at the girl.

"I think he's just being an idiot." Miyako chimed in. "What kind of desperate creep just proposes to a girl he's not even dating?"

There's that word again. Dating. What does that even mean?

"Seriously, especially with the way you laughed." Meimei said. "Are you intentionally trying to humiliate her?"

"Why would I?" Eren asked.

"Because you know she likes you." Meimei said.

"If she did, then why did she reject me?" Eren asked.

"Because you only met her barely a month ago!" Meimei yelled, as if it was obvious.

"And?" Eren asked. "That's been a long time."

"You're serious." Meimei said in realization.

"Why wouldn't I be?" Eren asked. "I don't see why you're so upset Meme."

"Meimei!" She yelled. "It's Meimei!"

"And?" Eren asked. "Why would I try to remember your name?"

"Excuse me?" She asked, offended.

"Ever since I've gotten to this country, people have been insulting me for not knowing things that are basic to you." He said in a frustrated tone.

"W-well-"

"You've done nothing but insult my intelligence." He said. "You two have shown hostility and distrust to me for no reason." He pointed to Saitou and Miyako. "So, I don't care to remember your names. The only person who apologized for insulting me was Ai, and she did so accidentally."

"Ok, I see your point." Meimei said.

"Do you?" Eren asked. "Because you all seem to forget that my home is not nearly as advanced as yours. Our culture is entirely different and a lot less technologically advanced. Yet you always insult me for not knowing something that I've never experienced before. I'm not an idiot. I'm well educated. Just because I don't know your culture, doesn't make me an idiot."

Saitou, Meimei, and Miyako looked down as Eren called them out on their disrespect towards him. They knew that he was right. They're

expecting him to know something that he couldn't possibly know since he lived in a war torn Crimea.

"You're right." Meimei relented. "I didn't realize I was being so disrespectful to you; I am very sorry." She bowed.

"Yea, me too Eren." Miyako said. "Even after everything you did for us, putting yourself in danger to save Ai."

"I still don't like you, but I do admit I was also being rude. I'm sorry as well. I was in the wrong here." Saitou said.

"Thanks." Eren said, not expecting them to actually listen to him.

"But that's not the issue." Meimei said. "What about Ai?"

"She clearly rejected me." Eren shrugged.

"No, she wanted to date you." Meimei said.

"Again, what is that?" Eren asked.

"Well- *eto...* " How do you describe dating exactly?

"Basically." Miyako began. "You go out on dates to get to know each other more, like getting dinner for example." She explained.

"So, basically do exactly what we've been doing since we met?" Eren asked.

"Those weren't dates though." Meimei said.

"Yea, you need romance for there to be a date." Miyako said.

"So, go out to dinner... romantically?" Eren asked, not fully understanding the difference.

"Exactly!" Meimei said, not understanding that Eren didn't know what they were talking about.

"Let me give you an example." Miyako said. "You go to a cafe or something like that, order a drink with two straws, and both drink out of it. It's a cute couple thing."

"But doesn't that mean we'd have less of a drink since we're sharing it?" Eren asked.

"Sort of, it's supposed to be romantic." Miyako said.

"How is sharing a drink romantic?" Eren asked.

"Ok, how about instead, matching couple's clothes. It's a very popular thing in Japan." Meimei said.

"You want me to wear a skirt?" He asked.

"No!" Meimei said quickly. "I mean colors."

"But why?" Eren asked. "That all seems pointless."

"In our culture, it's romantic." Meimei said.

"And you do this for a year, then get married?" He asked.

"Sort of, it depends on when each person is ready. I guess there's no real issues in getting married in a month if both people feel comfortable with each other. But for Ai, it might be a little fast." Meimei explained.

"Besides, you need to put more effort into a proposal." Miyako said.

"How?" Eren asked. "What is the courtship like in this country? It's straight forward in mine."

"Well, normally a man gets down on one knee and presents a diamond ring to his love." Meimei said. "It's more of a western tradition, but a lot of couples these days do that."

"Why a diamond ring?" Eren asked.

"Because it represents marriage here." Miyako said, holding up her own ring.

"And can get expensive." Saitou chuckled.

"Why are diamonds expensive?" Eren asked.

"They're not where you're from?" Miyako asked.

"No." Eren shook his head. "They're not cheap, but they're useless. Why would anyone really buy them? I might as well get her platinum."

"Platinum is very expensive too..." Miyako stared at him.

"It's expensive here?" Eren asked. "Isn't it just unripe silver?"

" *Don't call him stupid, don't call him stupid.* " Miyako whispered to herself in Japanese.

"If I just need to buy her something expensive, how about a bucket of salt?" Eren said.

"Salt is not expensive." Meimei said.

"Not here, but where I'm from it is." He said.

"Look, it's just a ceremony we do here." Meimei said. "But that aside, Ai does want to date you. She was planning to confess before you outright proposed."

"She was going to confess." Eren said to himself.

"Let me ask you something Eren." Meimei began. "Do you love Ai?"

"No, at least not right now." He said.

"How can you marry someone if you're not sure you love them?" She asked.

"It's not really that important." Eren shrugged. "Marriage is a transaction. It can lead to love, and I do believe I can love her one day, but it's not that important right now."

"Well, here it is important." Meimei said. "It's probably the most important thing in this country. You don't marry until you are sure you love someone. And now Ai is so confused because she doesn't know how to react to this."

"I see." Eren thought to himself. "Well, we should talk then." He turned around in the hopes of finding Ai.

If she was confused, then they should talk it out and come to an understanding. Clearly, there was a cultural difference here that was causing issues, so they needed to talk and clear the confusion if they hoped to move forward in any way.

"Wait, give it at least a day or two!" Meimei called out.

"Why?" Eren asked.

"Because she's probably really confused right now. So, give it time." She said.

"I'd rather fix it now instead of waiting." He said, leaving them in the room.

Eren went after Ai, leaving the kids and adults alone in the dance room. Everyone was unsure of exactly what to do after the complete up and down their emotions just went through. They all felt tired after the little exchange.

Ruby was having difficulty following along, but kind of figured out what was going on based on context clues.

" *So, Eren-San is our papa now?* " She asked Aqua.

Ok, she didn't follow along very well.

" *No Ruby, he is not.* " Aqua said.

" *But he proposed. Mama loves him, right?* " She asked.

" *Ruby-Chan.* " Meimei squatted down to her level. " *There was just a misunderstanding and they're only going to try and date for now. No papa's for you yet.* "

" *I think they should get married.* " Ruby said.

" *It's a little forward, don't you think?* " Aqua asked.

" *No.* " She said.

" *Aw~* " Meimei said. " *Such an innocent little baby.* " She hugged her.

" *Stop-* " Ruby struggled as Meimei hugged her tightly.

Eren spotted Ai at the end of the hall, next to a large window that took up most of the wall. The sun was setting, creating a slight orange and yellow hue that shined through the window. Ai's features were darkened by the sun, no doubt she would be illuminated if Eren stood between her and the window.

Ai turned around as he approached, a faint blush on her cheeks as she recalled the previous conversation that they just had.

"Hey Ai." Eren greeted.

"E-Eren. How are you?" Ai wanted to slap herself with such a dumb response.

"Sorry about earlier." Eren said.

"You don't have to be." Ai said. "I was the one who left you without a response. I'm sorry." She bowed.

"You really have to stop doing that." He said.

"It's a common curtesy in Japan." Ai said. "Normally when you apologize, you bow. And the depth depends on how sorry you are or how much higher in status the person you're apologizing to is."

"Really?" Eren asked. "So how important am I compared to you?"

"You're actually below me." Ai stuck her tongue out at him.

"Is that right?" Eren laughed subtly.

"Yea, I am a famous idol after all. You should bask in my radiant glow." Ai posed while giggling.

"I think your daughter would sacrifice me if it meant appeasing some god for your success." He laughed.

"Yea, Ruby does sometimes say weird things." She giggled.

"But I wanted you to know, that Meimei explained the mix up to me." Eren said.

"I figured." Ai said. "I thought about it and came to the conclusion that you're from a rural area and probably more traditional than we are." She said.

"That's about right." Eren said.

"I should have realized sooner. But I was a little surprised to be honest." She said.

"It's ok." Eren waved her apology off. "I understand. Now that I understand the context, I can see why you ran."

"I mean, I've never had someone seriously ask me to marry them." She said but thought for a moment. "Unless you count a random fan screaming in the crowd." She giggled.

"Meimei also told me that you were planning to confess to me about your feelings."

Damn it Meimei. Why did she just outright say that? Now Ai can't play it off... not that she would want to, but it's nice to have the option.

"Y-yea." Ai said. "And considering you asked me to marry you, I'm assuming you're also interested." It was stupid to have doubts, but she couldn't help herself.

"Yea." Eren said. "I don't know if I love you, but I would like to try."

"You'd marry a girl that you're not sure you love?" Ai asked.

"Where I'm from, marriage is more of a uniting of families than anything else. Love isn't as important as having kids and raising them well." He said.

"It's kind of the opposite here, you need to be sure you love someone before you marry them." She said.

"What if the guy is poor?" Eren asked.

"If you love someone, I don't think it should matter much." Ai said. "Besides, money comes and goes. I know that better than most."

"Interesting way of seeing it." Eren laughed.

"But do you even know how to date?" Ai asked.

"Not really, Meimei explained it to me but it's still confusing." He said.

"How so?"

"Something about doing what we've been doing but romantically." Eren shrugged. "I don't get how you can eat dinner romantically."

"Well, we could try sharing a drink with two straws." Ai suggested with a smile.

"See, she mentioned that. And I don't understand it." He said. "How is sharing a drink romantic?"

"Because it's like an indirect kiss." Ai said.

"Why kiss indirectly?" Eren asked. "Why not just kiss?"

"W-well..." Ai thought about it. "I don't know, it's just romantic." She shrugged.

"Right." Eren laughed to himself.

"It is." Ai glared at him. "You'll see when we go out on a date. I'll show you just how romantic it can be."

"I don't know, you're not very good at most th-" Ai punched Eren in the arm.

"*Itai~*" I moaned as she held her fist. "Stop working out so much, it hurts to hit you."

"I don't think I should be the one taking commands from someone who hit me." He laughed.

"You're not very good either." She verbally jabbed back at him. "I mean, no ring or any thought into a proposal. Just saying it outright."

"Apparently I need to buy a diamond or something." Eren shrugged. "The courting rituals here are different."

"A diamond ring would be nice." Ai giggled.

"Something about it being expensive, right?" Eren asked.

"It's more the thought really." She said. "I don't want expensive."

"If you want me to flaunt my wealth, I could just buy a bucket of salt." He laughed.

Ai actually started to laugh at that. She held her stomach, imagining Eren getting down on one knee and proposing with a bucket of salt, before tripping and covering himself in salt. It was a funny image and not at all what she'd expect from him.

"Salt is more expensive than a diamond in Ukraine?" She asked, calming her laughter.

Eren honestly had no idea, but it was more expensive at his home. diamonds were just useless rocks. Salt not only adds flavor to food but is necessary to stay healthy.

"Yea." Eren said. "I actually would get paid in salt back in the Scouts."

"Paid in salt?" She asked.

"Most payment went to food and our gear maintenance. Especially since our funding was bad. Half of our pay would be a pound of meat a week and a small bag of salt per week." He explained.

"Getting paid in salt?" Ai asked. "That's why you put salt on everything."

"Yea, it is delicious." Eren said. "We'd only be able to put a pinch of salt per meal before you ran out at the end of the week. Though we did save up some when we went on missions."

"What did you eat during missions?" Ai asked.

"Mostly dried bread, though occasionally canned foods." He said. "It depended on how long we were on mission."

"That sounds disgusting." Ai said.

"It was better than the field rations we had in the Cadet Corp." He laughed. "A pinch of salt makes anything taste good."

"That's terrible for nutrition." Ai said. "A pound of meat a week? You need more protein to be healthy. I'm terrified to ask what you ate normally."

"Mostly vegetable stews that we'd get from our farms or some merchants." Eren said. "You get used to it."

"Well, you're going to eat nutritiously while I'm here." Ai said. "I'll make sure that from now on, all your meals are cooked by me."

"So, like a wife?" Eren joked.

"Watch it, I'll run away again." She giggled.

"You can't outrun me." He joked.

"I'll have Ruby attack you."

"Then I might actually lose." He joked.

Ai and Eren paused for a moment to watch the setting sun, letting the glow from the sunlight wash over them.

"Are you sure you're ok with dating?" Ai asked. "It's not something you've done before."

"I'm a stranger in this country." Eren said. "I have no right to make you follow my customs, especially with you being so uncomfortable by it."

"It's just too soon for me right now." Ai said.

"I know, and don't worry. I understand." Eren smiled at her. "So, I'll wait till you are ready, and do this dating thing until I figure it out. It's only fair since I'm a guest in your country."

"Well, I'll come up with a plan for our first official date." Ai said.

"Really?" Eren asked.

"Since you're new to it, I'll do the planning first. Typically, the man does all the planning, so once you understand how it works, I expect you to plan our dates from then on." She said.

"Sure." Eren shrugged. "Just don't be surprised if I screw it up since I have very little knowledge on this subject."

"Which is why I'll forgive you the first few times." Ai giggled.

"Sure." Eren said. "So, does kissing happen during dating or after marriage?" He asked.

"W-well, during d-dating of course." Ai said. "But you need the right atmospher-"

Ai was completely shocked as she felt Eren's lips on hers. He had to bend down to reach her, especially since he was so tall. Her eyes were wide, and she was paralyzed in complete shock.

She could see Eren's face from the kiss, the glow from the sunset making his skin turn almost bronze, with highlights in his hair from the sunlight. He looked so amazing right now, even if she knew her eyes were crossed from having his face so close to hers.

She closed her eyes as she let him kiss her. It was a very innocent kiss, no tongue involved. Though, Ai wondered if Eren even knew what that was since he was so traditional.

Eren pulled away from the kiss, standing back to his full height and looking down at Ai, who was blushing furiously from the sudden action.

"Seriously, don't you care what people think about you?" She tried to get her mind off of the kiss she had.

She was once again surprised by how sudden and bold he was. Not a single care in what people thought about him. He had a tendency to do things suddenly and without warning, which was another thing that made her attracted to him.

When she looked up at him, Eren was almost glowing in the sunlight. Ai admitted that this view, plus his sudden boldness, was actually really romantic.

"Why would I?" Eren asked.

"Like when you proposed earlier. How can you be so bold in front of everyone?" She asked, not sure how he can just be himself and not caring what others thought of him.

"They all don't like me, and the feeling is mutual." Eren shrugged. "So, I really don't care what they think. Besides, if you said yes, they'd know eventually."

"I guess." Ai said. "Don't worry though, Aqua-Chan and Ruby-Chan like you. So, everything is ok." She giggled.

"We should head back." Eren said. "Before that president of yours gets upset again."

"Go easy on him." Ai said. "He does care about his employees a lot, so it's only natural that he's worried about mister mysterious over here."

"Mysterious?" Eren asked.

"Yea, it took so long to learn about where you're from." Ai said. "I almost have to pry information about your past from you sometimes."

"I'd rather most things stay in the past." He said.

Ai understood that. There were things about herself that she wanted to remain buried, specifically about her mother. Eren was also a war

veteran, and she could guess that he must have struggled with that for so long.

She hoped that eventually he would share those stories with her, for no other reason than for her to help him to feel better. She wanted his eyes to shine with that same innocents she saw at the beach, and never with the rage he showed against Ryosuke and that Yakuza guy.

" *Mama!* " Ruby ran up to her and hugged her leg.

" *Hey Ruby-Chan!* " She said back to her.

" *Is papa coming home?* "

" *Eh?* " Ai asked in shock.

"What did she say?" Eren asked.

"Oh, nothing." Ai tried to deflect. "She just asked what's for dinner." She lied.

"You do realize that I know what the word papa means, right?" He asked.

"Then please just let me think you believed my lie." Ai said with a blush before turning back to Ruby. " *Eren-San and I are taking things slow Ruby-Chan, he's not your papa.* "

" *So, you two aren't getting married yet?* " She asked.

Aqua face palmed, once again wondering just how young Ruby was before she died. She had to be close to ten at the oldest. Maybe thirteen if he was right and she was emotionally stunted like Ai was.

" *No, we're not.* " Ai said. " *But we will try dating first, so he's not your papa for a while. If it ever does happen.* "

" *Well, I'm still going to call him papa.* " Ruby said defiantly.

Ai just sighed, though found her daughters naive and childish version of romance cute. Ruby was still so young so for her, romance was as simple as a child's anime. Fast with very little worries or issues. She smiled at how innocent her daughter was.

" Normally I'd say you'd chase him off with how you're acting. " Aqua chimed in. " But considering he proposed, I don't think he'd care. "

Then there was Aqua, who had such a grown-up view of the world despite being four. She wished sometimes that he could just be a regular child and have the same naive views as his sister. She blamed him watching the news all the time.

However, she did find it adorable in its own way. He always acted older than he was, and she always imagined that he would put up that front to try and act more mature than he was. It was cute, if a little heart breaking.

" Aqua-Chan. " Ai frowned at him. " Stop being such a big boy. Just be like Ruby-Chan, naive and cute. "

Really? She got upset about that? Granted, he probably should have a childish mindset on love since everyone thought he was four, which he kind of is, but out of everyone in this room, he probably had the most relationship experience. Minus probably Saitou and Miyako since they probably dated other people before marrying.

"Welcome to the family Eren-San." He said in a deadpanned expression.

" Oh, my little man. " Ai giggled and went to gently hug him, interpreting it as another example of his stoic nature. " We should head home. You two have first day of school tomorrow and we need to make some delicious food. Want to eat over Eren? "

Eren looked at her and just sighed.

"I mean, want to eat with us tonight?" She said in English.

"Sure." He said.

Another fun one to write.

So, I am taking some liberties with AoT. Soldiers in Paradis probably would have half their pay be in salt, food, maybe even alcohol. That's actually very common in older armies, especially salt. In fact, the term Soldier originates from the Latin word "Sal Dare", literally "To give salt" since Roman Soldiers were paid in salt. Their monthly allowance was called "Salarium", which is likely where the word "Salary" comes from. Though these are still speculative.

One odd thing is that AoT has canned food in season 2 (The for public disclosure picture before the commercial break), which wouldn't be possible in their level of technology. Not referring to the one found in the castle, since that was Marleyan. Then again, ODM isn't even possible today, so not a big deal lol.

Anyway, yea, there was a few changes in relationships lol. Obviously, there is some cultural differences, and I wanted to avoid the trope of having them separate again. I think it works better that they talk it out immediately and Ai is able to recognize the cultural difference after her initial shock.

Anyway, hope this was a nice wholesome moment after the Ginza attack. I also hope it meets expectations set up when Eren said he was going to propose lol.

The Day Before the Rescue

Chapter 34: The Day Before the Rescue

"Time for school!" Ruby yelled as she jumped out of Ai's arms and ran over to her dresser.

"Ruby-Chan~" Ai groaned, reaching out with her arms to find her now missing daughter, still half asleep.

"Come on mama, time for school!" Ruby said.

Ai opened her eyes and saw that Ruby was already dressed in her school uniform, changing quickly from the excitement. She ran into the bathroom in order to brush and smooth out her hair into her favorite side ponytail style.

"Ruby-Chan, slow down. You'll tire yourself out." Ai said, though she knew that Ruby would not get tired.

Children never ran out of energy. Ai read somewhere that kids have such a high metabolism that they actually gain stamina faster than they can lose it, meaning that she can just run and not stop till she goes to sleep.

"Wait, where's your brother?" Ai got worried, mostly from the previous times he's gone missing.

"I'm in here Ai!" He called from the main room.

Aqua was already dressed in his school uniform and finishing packing his book bag. He was busy taking everything out so that he could double check that he had everything. He was always so meticulous.

"Are you excited Aqua-Chan?" Ai smiled as she kneeled down next to him.

"Yes." He said, though without any enthusiasm.

He actually was a little excited. He honestly missed going to school and sort of look forward to it. It would be much easier this time around since he was already an adult. The basic two plus two questions would be literal child's play.

He knew he'd need to look up more advanced subjects, since he hasn't done calculus or trigonometry since his early college years nearly a decade ago, but he had a few years before he needed to worry about that. For now, he can just have fun and ace everything.

He feels like his best subject will be health class and biology through. He was a doctor after all.

"Ehhh?" Ai drew out, poking him on the cheek.

"I really am." He said.

He really hated having to act enthusiastic about everything like a kid. You can only overexaggerate so many times before it gets tiring. Plus, it's embarrassing to act like a four-year-old, even if he technically was.

"Just make sure you avoid pretty girls Aqua-Chan." Ai said.

Avoid prett- he was four. Did she think he was going to try dating?

"Sure Ai." No problem there.

"Almost ready?" Ruby ran up to him and smiled.

"Yes." Aqua said.

Suddenly, both children were brought closer by a hug from their mother, who squeezed them tightly to her chest and kissed them

both on the top of the head. Ai felt tears beginning to leak out of her eyes but managed to hold it back.

"My babies are growing up." She said sadly. "Stop growing up, stay babies forever."

"I'll find a way mama." Ruby said absentmindedly.

"Sure Ai." Aqua shrugged, knowing that this was an emotional moment for a mother.

He had many women come through that he would talk to as a doctor. They would talk about their families while getting checked during routine health exams and he knew that many of them would get emotional when their children either left home or showed that they were growing.

Especially some of the women he helped them to deliver would come back for a check and cry at how much older their kids got. Ai was no different.

"Now, let's get a picture!" All sadness went from her voice as she took out her phone.

Ai shifted so she was on her knees behind them and held her phone out so she could get a picture of the three of them. Ai put her hand over Aqua's shoulder and smiled. Ruby tilted her head and gave a subtle smile but held up a peace sign. Aqua gave a little smirk, feeling happy that Ai could have this moment.

After they finished with a few more pictures, Ai helped them finish getting ready and made breakfast. Eren was at work so he couldn't join, but she did pack a bento box for him last night, which he took with him. She made it full of vegetables, meat, and other nutrients so he can have a healthy lunch.

Ai pushed both kids towards the door and helped them to get their shoes on. She always loved helping them get ready since it made

her feel needed as a mother, though she knew she'd eventually have to let them get ready on their own. Just not yet.

However, Aqua was still hurt and in his sling, so it gave her a perfect excuse to dote on him all the time. Even if she wished it never happened, she was glad she was there to care for him and make the recovery process easier.

Thankfully, he was diligent with his physical therapy. She never had to remind him to do his exercises and he knew exactly when too much was too much. At first, he had trouble meeting the goals that were set because of the pain, but now he was able to complete each set easily, so it was showing that he was healing.

"Now listen Aqua-Chan, if anyone tries to bully you, you go straight to a Sensei." Ai said.

"I know." Aqua said.

"I don't want anyone pushing you or playing rough while recovering." She lectured. "So, stay away from playgrounds for now and make sure you don't exert yourself until after your arm heals. Understand?"

"Yes Ai." Not that he intended to do any of that. He packed a few books to read while everyone was playing during recess.

"Good boy." Ai smiled, giving him another kiss on the head. "Miyako-San is here, so be safe. I love you."

"I love you too Ai." He replied.

"I love you too Ruby-Chan." Ai kissed Ruby on the top of the head.

Both kids got into Miyako's car since she was going to be the one dropping them off. Ai waved good bye and blew a few more kisses as they left. She felt like crying as her baby boy and girl were now getting older.

Eren walked up to Miyuki's home, which was a small apartment situated on the second floor. Sergei was running an errand, so Eren decided to take the long walk to Miyuki's house and go over what happened during the attack and their upcoming plan.

Eren dressed up in his suit, minus the fedora, glasses, and jacket. His turtleneck sweater was untucked so he could hide his gun in the back of his waistband.

Eren walked up to the door and knocked three times, hard enough to get his attention but soft enough to not be too loud. He heard movement behind the door and knew that someone was home.

The door opened, showing a young girl, maybe fourteen or fifteen, with very light-colored hair and dressed in a simple shirt and short shorts. Eren remembered that she was the girl that Sergei showed Miyuki, his little sister, Rei or Kei or something like that.

" *Can I help you?* " She asked in Japanese.

"Is Miyuki home?" Eren asked, hoping she understood English.

"Oh, English?" She asked, her accent heavy but understandable. "My brother isn't home yet, he's finishing up some stuff. Who are you?"

"I work with him." Eren said.

"At his after-school job, right?" She asked, giving Eren a perfect cover.

"Yes, we work together, and I need to talk about some things with him." Eren said.

"Well, he texted that he was on his way home. You're welcome to come in and wait for him." The girl said, opening the door and inviting him in.

"Are you parents' home?" Eren asked.

"My dad's at work, so just me right now." She said while Eren took off his dress shoes.

"So, you just let random strangers into your home while you're alone?" He asked, pointing out her complete lack of safety considerations.

"We have a camera right outside, so if you try anything then the police would get you." She narrowed her eyes in suspicion.
"Besides, you can't be bad if you work for my brother. So that at least makes you somewhat trustworthy."

Eren had to face palm at how gullible this family was. How did she know he wasn't lying? What if he didn't care about getting caught and only wanted to hurt her. Thank goodness Sergei has at least a small number of morals, otherwise she would be easy to kidnap.

Come to think of it, everyone in the world was completely relaxed around strangers. Japan was much safer than Paradis, where everyone took precautions since the concept of cameras and phones were non-existent. She probably felt that the camera and her own phone gave her enough security to trust a stranger.

"If you think so." Eren said.

"So, what are you and my brother discussing. No one ever comes by to see him about work." She asked as she sat down on her knees at the dinner table, taking out her phone and browsing through it.

"I was passing by and wanted to go over a job coming up." Eren said with some truth. "Just moving some stuff and it'll take a bit of planning."

"Sounds boring." She said. "What's your name by the way, I didn't catch it?"

"Eren Yeager." He said.

"Oh, are you German?" She asked.

"No, I'm Ukrainian." He said.

"That's cool, I never met a Ukrainian." She said. "I'm Shirogane Kei, Kei being my-"

"Given name, I know." Eren said. "A lot of people here introduce themselves that way."

"That's fair." Kei gave a light giggle. "I guess for a foreigner, it can get annoying."

"Sometimes." Eren said seriously.

Kei felt a little uncomfortable by how he acted. He was polite but overly serious. It reminded her of her brother, but without any of the awkward humor. Eren just seemed to be completely in business mode and making small talk for the sake of small talk.

"*Hey Kei, I'm ho-*" Miyuki walked through the door before stopping when he saw Eren.

"Miyuki." Eren nodded at him.

Miyuki was frozen on the spot and Kei was wondering why he seemed worried. He looked like he was terrified by something, but he never really got scared. She wondered if he was in trouble at work since he has never once gotten in trouble for anything before.

"H-hey Eren-San." He stuttered nervously. "H-how are you doing? Everything going good with Ai?"

"We're dating now." He shrugged.

"Who's Ai?" Kei asked.

"You know how we met Ai a little while ago?" Miyuki said. "From B-Komachi."

"You're Dating Ai from B-Komachi?!" Kei screamed at Eren.

"You do know she tries to keep a low profile, right?" Eren asked.

"Kei is good with secrets." Miyuki said. "Besides, I couldn't not tell her."

"I love Ai!" She screamed. "I-I mean." Kei tried to calm herself down. "She is pretty cool."

Miyuki sighed, there goes his Tsundere of a sister again, trying not to overreact about learning about her favorite idol.

"What's she like?" She asked.

"She's like a person I guess." Eren shrugged. "Why is everyone so obsessed with her?"

"Because she's amazing and pretty." Kei said. "Don't you think so?"

"She's pretty, sure." Eren shrugged. "But we just started dating, so I'm still learning about it."

"Learning?" Kei asked.

"I actually proposed to her yesterday." Kei squealed when she heard that. "But in my culture, that's normal. I never even heard of dating before."

"Did she say yes?" Kei asked.

"No, she wanted to date first, follow this country's culture." Eren said. "So, I'm lost."

"Well, my brother is an "expert", right bro?" Kei grinned at Miyuki, hoping to embarrass him slightly.

"I-I am- I mean, I am. Yea." He grinned to himself. "Eren, you are in luck because I have extensive knowledge on women."

Seriously? Did he forget that as far as he was concerned, Eren was a threat to his sister? Was his ego that high that he'd give romantic advice to a criminal?

"Sure, go ahead." Eren said in a deadpanned voice.

"Kei, come here." Miyuki said. "I'll need your help."

"Wait, why me?" Kei asked.

"Because I need a practice dummy and Eren is too tall." Miyuki said. "Just come over here and help, this was your idea."

"Whatever." Kei sighed, now regretting her jab at her brother's experience with women.

"What I'm going to teach you, is the tried-and-true wall slam technique." Miyuki smirked.

"Don't you dar-"

Without warning, Miyuki slammed one hand next to Kei, freaking her out from the sudden loud bang on the wall and the sudden closeness. Her heart was racing from the surprised movement.

"It's a classic that I've seen have a one hundred percent success rate." He left out that he only saw one instance of it. "It takes them by surprise and instantly shows how bold you are."

"So, completely entrap them like an attack..." Eren said in a very unsure voice.

" *Baka!* " Kei screamed out after getting her bearings. "That's the dumbest idea ever! Who even wall slams anymore!? That's something only preschoolers do!"

"It's effective!" Miyuki said. "It's a whole plan. See, you only use one arm so you can make her feel safer."

"That does not make a girl feel safe!" Kei yelled again. "Instead of a wall slam, you should just walk around and be gentler."

"Gentler?" Eren asked.

"You know, put your arm on the small of her back when you walk." She suggested. "Or maybe you can hold her hand or put your arm around her shoulder. When you open the door for her, push her in gently to show both dominance but gentleness."

"Dominant but gentle?" Miyuki asked. "You can get the same thing from a wall slam."

"The wall slam is not gentle!" Kei argued. "That's just complete dominance! You need a balance."

"But you said be dominant." Miyuki said.

"Dominant as in in charge and confident!" She yelled. "Not tie you up and throw you in the trunk kind of dominant!"

"Sweet innocent Kei, I think someone with my experience would know." Miyuki bragged.

"What is your experience?" Eren asked.

"W-well, y-you know. I don't want to brag." He tried to deflect without outright lying.

"Right." Eren said.

"Besides, if you don't know women Eren, then Miyuki here will teach you." He referred to himself in third person, making Kei face palm.

"I'm familiar." Eren said.

"Y-you are?" He asked, now worried that he'll be discovered that he knows nothing about women.

"I just don't know how dating works." He said. "Again, my culture doesn't have it. We marry very quick."

"Then how do you have any experience?" Kei asked.

"I've had sex before." Eren said.

"S-" Kei froze, too embarrassed to say the word out loud.

"Uh- I- Uh-" Miyuki stuttered.

Yes, when Historia was planned to be turned into the Beast Titan, Eren and her found a way to prolong it just enough to facilitate his plan and save her from being slaughtered in thirteen years. The MPs were unsure of the effects of being turned into a Titan with a pregnant woman, so they postponed it until Eren could enact his Rumbling.

Needless to say, they had to try a few times before she would conceive, so he got decent at it. It was even seen as a way for both of them to give into their baser instincts, helping to push away the trauma they felt and the immense guilt Eren felt with his plan.

After they were sure she conceived, she met an old friend of hers from her village and formed a relationship with him. She married him on the spot, and it allowed for the perfect cover story for her pregnancy.

Eren can't say he loved Historia though. She was his friend and comrade, someone he truly loved in a non-romantic way. But he never saw himself marrying her. He always imagined himself with Mikasa if he ever did have a future.

But that was the past and Eren didn't want to think about it.

"Well then, you have maybe a bit more experience than me." Miyuki tried to save face.

"I-I mean, Ai is a lovely maiden, why would she be interested in you?" Kei asked.

"I mean, Ai does have- Ow!" Miyuki stopped talking when Eren hit him in the head.

"Would you learn the concept of privacy!" Eren raised his voice.

"I-I'm going to go get food for tonight!" Kei said with a blush.

"Where?" Miyuki asked.

"I don't know, I'm going out with a friend! So, you just stay here!" She ran into her room to get changed.

After a few moments, Kei was dressed and practically ran out the door, hiding her blush at the turn of the conversation. She wanted to get away from the stupid boys and their stupid conversation about girls.

"Well, that could have gone better." Miyuki laughed awkwardly.

"Now that she's gone, we should talk business." Eren said.

"That's a crazy topic change!" Miyuki yelled out.

"Is everyone in this country a bunch of terrified children when it comes to sex, or is it just you?" Eren asked.

"It's just embarrassing." Miyuki said.

"It's just sex." Eren shrugged. "What do you think will happen if you marry Kaguya?"

"M-m-marry?" Miyuki stuttered. "S-sex with Shinomiya?"

Miyuki blushed as he pictured it in his head, imagining him and Shinomiya together in their room, her wearing a-

"Ow!" He yelled out as Eren hit him in the head.

"Would you focus!" Eren yelled, getting annoyed at the hormonal teenager.

Even when he was younger, Eren didn't get shy around women. Granted, he never gave women a single thought, but Miyuki was just taking it to another level.

"As you can guess, the Ginza attack went poorly, so Yoshida is going to keep her. Meaning we'll need to rescue her." Eren explained.

"Ok, so did you find her?" Miyuki asked.

"Sergei found where she's being kept." Eren said.

"Really?" Miyuki asked. "Where?"

"She's being moved after Ginza to a night club in southern Tokyo." Eren said. "She'll be moved into one of the underground storage rooms and be taken to an unknown location after that. Tomorrow will be the only time we'll have to get her before she disappears again."

"So, what do we do?" Miyuki asked.

"You'll sneak in, posing as a Yakuza member and free her. You'll be the one moving her, at least that's the lie we'll tell them. Sergei will communicate with you and tell you everything you need to say. Once you have her, get out of there and get onto the street. From there, make noise and attract the police. They'll take her back home."

"It's a crazy plan." Miyuki said. "It all relies on me." He said.

"If anything goes wrong, I'll break in and get you out." Eren said.

"Won't the Yakuza boss know who you are?" He asked.

"Sergei is letting me use a Special Assault Team uniform from his list of outfits. Complete with an Empee-five." Eren said.

"Really, you know how to use it?" He asked.

"Sergei has been teaching me while you were at school." Eren said.
"Don't worry, we'll save Kaguya. Trust me."

"Right, we will." Miyuki said.

"We need to avoid killing people, so be careful." Eren said.

"Well, I won't be able to really fight if it comes down to it." He said.

"I don't need you to. I literally only need you because you're Japanese." Eren said.

"Great, well I got that at least." Miyuki said sarcastically.

Ruby went down the slide for the fifth time in the past few minutes. It was so much fun getting to climb around on a playground. She hasn't been able to enjoy this feeling in years, both because of her cancer and the new life as a toddler.

She just wished mama was here to see it. She would have so much fun with Ai. Eren too, who she started to see as an almost inseparable part of the family now. He was strong, brave, and kind.

Ruby honestly wondered if that is what a father should be. Someone to protect her and her mother, while also playing around with her and letting her win all the time. Of course, she knew he always let her win; she was basically an adult now, so she understood how adults worked. She's finally sixteen! a full-grown woman!

Well, mentally anyway. Not physically anymore.

"Hey, Ruby-Chan!" She heard someone call her name.

Ruby turned to the edge of the playground, which had a waist high concrete wall and a fence on top, separating the kids from any potential predators or kidnappers.

"Kamiki-San?" She asked in confusion.

He was dressed in a simple coat with a ballcap and sunglasses, likely hiding just like Ai does.

"Hey, it's good to see you." He waved to her. "I saw you were going to school and wanted to say hi."

Ruby saw no reason not to run over to him and say hi. He was her actual father after all.

"Hi kamiki-San!" Ruby waved as she ran over to him.

"Not papa?" He asked in a feigned but playful hurtful tone.

"Nope, not yet." She said. "You'd have to earn it first."

"That's fair." He giggled. "Well, why don't you tell me about your day? Are you having fun?" he asked.

"Yea, it's the first time I can play on the slide." In this life, she said to herself. "Aqua is being boring." She narrowed her eyes at her brother, who had his back to her and reading his book.

"Well, I called your mama, and she said it would be ok for us to go somewhere together. Have a little father daughter time." He flashed her a charming smile.

Ruby considered it. She wasn't supposed to leave school until it was over, but if an adult was picking her up, with mama's permission, it should be fine. Right? He was her father, so he should be as nice as Ai.

"I guess that sounds fun." Ruby said. "What are you thinking?"

"Well, I was hoping to get some input from my daughter on a movie I'm writing." He said. "I figured you can come to papa's house, and we'll work on it together. I'll show you a bit about how entertainment works. You do want to be an idol, right?"

"Yea." Ruby said with a bit of excitement. He was an actor, she remembered her mama saying that once.

So, he must know a lot about it and have connections to help her when she got older.

"I'll tell the Sensei that you're picking me up." She said.

"Stop!" A loud voice called out from behind her.

Aqua was running at them full speed, his book on the ground where he was sitting, as if he was in a huge hurry.

"Get away Ruby!" He said, catching his breath from the awkward sprint.

His running was off balance due to the sling, but he looked unusually upset right now.

"What's wrong?" Ruby asked.

"Aqua-Chan, glad to see you." Kamiki smiled. "I wanted to know if you wanted to-"

"No!" He yelled, finally catching his breath. "You get out of here right now!"

"Aqua-Chan, I'm your father. Besides, your mother gave me permission-"

"Bullshit!" Aqua yelled.

"That's not a nice word Aqua-Chan." He said.

"To hell with you." Aqua growled. "I heard about what you did to Ai."

"Did?" Ruby asked, looking between Aqua and Kamiki.

"What do you mean son?" Kamiki asked.

Ruby noticed a large distaste in his mouth from what Kamiki said, as if he wanted to spit those words out from how disgusting it was. Why did her brother hate their father so much.

"You hurt Ai!" He said.

"What!?" Ruby yelled out.

"Aqua-Chan, sometimes adults-"

"What did you do!?" Now it was Ruby who was yelling.

"He grabbed her arm and tried to hurt her Ruby." Aqua said desperately, as if he was trying to convince her.

"Son, your mother is a good woman. But she's exaggerating." Kamiki said.

"Did you hurt mama?" Ruby narrowed her eyes.

"Ruby, sweetie. I care for your mother. And I care for you. I just want a chance to show you the kind of person I am." He seemed so sincere.

Ruby may have died young, but she wasn't stupid. She knew Aqua was older than she was and had more life experience. He refused to tell her why he hated Kamiki so much, but she would rather trust his judgement since she lived with him for four years. She just trusted him, and she didn't fully know why.

That being said, Kamiki tried to hurt Ai. She remembered seeing some shows and anime where the heroine was abused by a former love interest, which fits in her mind. Kamiki likely abused Ai, which made sense why her mama was always so cautious around him and why Aqua hated him.

For Ruby, Kamiki did the worst possible sin. He hurt her mama.

For a second, nothing happened. Everyone was quiet, unsure of what to do. Kamiki was wondering if Ruby would believe him or not. Aqua too, was wondering what was going to happen. He would physically stop Ruby if he had to.

Ruby inhaled deeply, ready to scream.

"MOLESTER!"

Suddenly, Senseis' were running over to her, shouting at Kamiki when they saw him. Ruby smirked in satisfaction as he scowled and ran away, unable and unwilling to try and explain himself. The look he gave Aqua before he ran though, was a murderous one. Aqua smirked, daring him to try something before he took off and ran.

"I'll be honest, I wouldn't have thought of that." Aqua said out loud as the Senseis' ran up to them.

Ruby was questioned by the teachers, she was going to say who it was, but Aqua quickly spoke for her, cutting her off. He explained it was some weird guy who was trying to lure Ruby away.

"Why didn't you let me say who it was?" She asked Aqua.

"Because if you say that it was our biological father, then the Police won't do anything about it. Technically, he does have a right to see us and they'll assume you're lying." He said.

"I wouldn't lie." Ruby said.

"That doesn't matter." Aqua said. "If we get the police to find him, it can open up potential court cases that will have him get looked at as a potential guardian, which would bring the issues of custody battles if he wanted to pursue it. Then we'd have to go see him."

Everything Aqua said was the truth. The Police wouldn't arrest him since he was their father and Ruby could be seen as lying since she was only four. It could also put him in a position to request custody

rights, which would ensure they get stuck with him and be used as bait against Ai.

Hikaru could also easily claim Ai was intentionally pitting the children against him, which could call into question her competence as a mother and potentially cost her some custody of the children. It was very unlikely, but a real possibility.

Aqua knew Hikaru wanted to avoid that, but if he was put in that situation, he would try to leverage it to his advantage.

"I don't like it." Ruby said.

"Plus, the police may have to report it and if it leaks, Ai will be found out." Again, it was the truth. "We can't let them know Hikaru was here."

"Ok." Ruby relented. "Thank you Aqua." She said.

"Sure." Aqua said. "I'm glad you're ok Ruby." Aqua said after a slight pause.

"Well, don't worry about me. I can handle myself." His tsundere of a sister said.

"Whatever you say." He said with a subtle laugh.

Ai was a mess when the kids got home. The school called Miyako, since they had her as their guardian, and in turn, Miyako called Ai. As far as anyone was concerned, a potential predator approached her children.

" *Don't you ever go up to a stranger ever again!* " Ai raised her voice at Ruby.

" *I'm sorry mama.* " Ruby said, tears threatening to spill out.

Ai saw her daughter getting upset and had to calm herself. She was getting emotional right now and was lashing out. If that bastard was nearby, Ai would kill him. She would grab whoever dared to try and lay a finger on her children and strangle him.

But she realized that she was taking that pent up aggression on Ruby, who really did nothing more than talk to a stranger. She had to be calm and loving if she hoped for her daughter to be safe.

Ai hugged her daughter, squeezing her into her chest as she rested her chin on Ruby's head. She gave a couple of kisses on Ruby's head.

" Please don't ever scare mama like that again. " She said softly. *" I was so worried. "*

" I won't mama. " Ruby cried, glad that her mother was calming down.

" I love you Ruby-Chan. " Ai said.

" I love you too mama. " She replied.

First her son gets stabbed, and her daughter nearly gets abducted. What is with the past few weeks? Not counting the fact that she almost died twice.

"Everything ok?" Eren asked, unable to follow the conversation that she had with her daughter.

"Yes." Ai lied. "I'm completely fine now."

"Good." Eren said, giving her a light pat on the shoulder.

"Head." Ruby said to Eren as she finished drying her tears.

"Head?" Eren asked.

Ruby took her hand and patted her own head, before pointing to Ai.

"Pata head papa." She said.

" *Please Ruby-Chan, stop saying that.* " Ai blushed.

Eren raised an eyebrow and looked at his hand really quick. Ai wasn't paying attention, so he decided to try out what Ruby suggested.

He reached out and put his hand on the top of Ai's head, who immediately froze and blushed at the contact.

"So, treat your lover like a dog." Eren said with a slight laugh to his voice. "Got it."

"I'm not a dog!" Ai barked at him.

"Mama hasa head pato!" Ruby exclaimed.

"So, what is this?" Eren asked, still rubbing Ai's head.

"I-it's supposed to be a relaxing t-thing in J-Japan." She said, her head getting low from embarrassment.

"Interesting." Eren said.

Ai pushed his hand off her head before going to finish making dinner.

Eren sat down with the family and continued to joke around with them. He was able to just relax and enjoy Ai and her children's company. It got easier to just relax around them after a while.

Without the looming threat of human extinction or genocide, Eren felt that he could just relax. Sure, there was the Yakuza that was an issue, but to be honest, that was small time compared to what he's dealt with before. It was still a threat since he didn't have his powers anymore, but he felt like he could relax still.

Ruby was finally starting to get English down. She could just about have full conversations with Eren and was mostly understandable.

Her progress was amazing, mostly because Ai was the best Sensei in Japan.

Plus, Eren was fun to talk to. He was serious a lot, which actually reminded her of Doctor Goro, but he was able to relax and even joke around with her and Ai.

Aqua and Eren didn't really interact much, which was weird since Ruby noted that they were so similar in a lot of ways. Almost like Eren was an older version of Aqua. Still, he was able to have a good time with the family and Ruby felt herself caring more and more about Eren.

She could tell Ai was still upset about earlier, but she was able to calm down. Ruby wished she could tell her the truth, but Aqua was right in that it would involve the Police and likely be leaked. Plus, the Police wouldn't do anything since he was their father, and they'd think Ruby would overreact.

So, she let Ai and the school believe it was a random guy.

Still, Ai was a bit on edge, so Ruby had to think of a way to calm her down.

" *Mama, dance!* " She said as she finished dinner.

" *Dance, now?* " Ai asked.

" *Bring Eren-San, you can teach us to dance.* " Ruby said, running over to the main room.

"What did she say?" Eren asked.

"She wants to do some dancing practice. What do you say Eren?" Ai asked.

"Sure." Eren said.

They moved over to the main room and Ai and Ruby got in the center. Ai put on a rerun of her Star T Rain song and started to show Ruby how to dance.

" *Mama, you were a little higher with your arm.* " Ruby said.

" *Was I?* " Ai asked.

" *Yea, like thi-* " Ruby was cut off as she fell.

Ai walked over to her and kneeled down, picking her up.

" *You need to focus on balance Ruby-Chan.* " Ai said. " *If you are bracing to fall, then you'll never keep your balance.* "

"Hey Ai, do you have those glow sticks?" Eren asked.

"Yea, they're in the box over there." She said.

"Red is your color, right?" He asked.

"Yes, why?" She asked.

Eren walked over to the box and got some out. He took three glow sticks out and walked over to the couch. He handed one to Aqua after cracking it, then took his own glow sticks and cracked those.

Ai started to laugh as Eren sat on the couch, one glow stick in each hand, and with a deadpanned serious face, started to flick the glowsticks in line with the rythm of the song. Aqua followed suit, his face more bored than serious.

"Ahahahahaha!" Ai laughed.

"Would you stop laughing and just dance." Eren at least had the courtesy to blush. "I'm cheering you two on."

"I'm sorry, I just didn't expect that." She said, wiping some tears away. " *Come on Ruby-Chan, we have two Otaku fans to cheer us*

on! " Ai posed for Eren and Aqua.

" *Ok!* " Ruby said, her worry was now gone.

She fell a few more times, but she started to get used to it. It was so easy to practice in this environment. Failing here was met with cheers, laughter, and encouragement to improve. She saw how uncomfortable Eren was with dancing with the glowsticks, but he did so anyway to make sure Ruby stayed happy.

She was happy to have a papa like Eren. He was so much better than Kamiki, since now she learned he abused her mama. Eren was kind and protective of them.

They danced for a few hours before Eren said he needed to go to sleep. He said he had an important day at work tomorrow, so he needed to sleep early and would be out late.

"I'll have a bento packed for you tomorrow." Ai smiled.

"Thanks." Eren said. "Good job tonight Ruby." Eren said to her.

"Tank yew papa." Ruby said.

Ruby grabbed his hand and put it on the top of her head, mimicking the same motion that Eren did earlier to Ai. Eren was still a bit confused, but figured it really was just a Japanese thing. Ruby let go of his hand as he rubbed her head by himself.

" *He's not your papa yet.* " Ai blushed, finding it cute what Eren was doing for Ruby.

"Goodnight." Eren said as he left their apartment.

" *Yes, he is.* " Ruby said after the door closed, intent on having the last word.

Here was an experiment, tonal shifts in a chapter lol. Hopefully the tone didn't shift too much or was jarring. I wanted to experiment with that, so please let me know if it was a good shift from suspenseful to wholesome. Criticism is welcome lol.

That being said, next chapter will finally be the Kaguya rescue. Set up 12 chapters ago lol. What a long set up. Now the pressure is on to make it meet expectations lol.

Rescue Operation

Chapter 35: Rescue Operation

"Calm down Miyuki." Eren said from the front seat of the van. "You'll be fine."

"You say that, but it's still nerve racking" Miyuki said as he scratched at his fake tattoos that were making his arms itch.

"Stop scratching kid." Sergei said from the driver's seat. "You'll peel them off."

"Sorry." Miyuki said.

Miyuki was dressed in typical street clothes with fake tattoos covering his arms. Sergei knew he wouldn't be able to pass for a higher up, so he dressed casually instead of having more business or formal dress. Miyuki's blonde hair was also slicked back with gel, something that was typically seen negatively in normal Japanese society.

Eren though was dressed much more tactically. He wore the typical blue tactical jacket and pants Miyuki saw when he saw news footage of Special Assault Teams. He had black body armor, a black military styled helmet with a hinged full-face visor, and black boots, gloves, knee and elbow pads.

He took a water bottle out of his jacket and took a sip before putting it back in. He was feeling thirsty.

"Are you sure this thing is the best you have?" Eren asked Sergei.

"You don't like it?" Sergei asked.

Miyuki noticed that Eren had a deployable riot shield on his left arm, which was a large block of steel that folded like a typical Chinese fan. It wasn't often used by the Special Assault Team compared to more conventional shields, but Sergei recommended it.

"I've never used a shield before." Eren said.

"It's only rated for small arms, anything bigger than a pistol will go through. Remember that and keep your MP5 ready."

Attached with a bungy sling was Eren's main gun, which Miyuki noticed was an MP5, which he would see in video games and movies occasionally. Eren also had a more modern pistol in his holster since his normal old gun was too much of a calling card.

"I just hope it doesn't come to that." Miyuki said.

"Do your job and it won't." Sergei said. "Call my phone to test our wire."

Miyuki put a pair of regular earphones in his ear and made sure it was connected to his phone. The plan was, he would call Sergei and maintain the line so Sergei could hear through the earphones, and he could talk to Miyuki to give him advice. It wasn't weird for delinquent to walk around with earphones in, so Miyuki should be able to sneak in.

"Testing." Miyuki said.

"You're connected." Sergei said.

"Remember Miyuki." Eren said. "Sergei will tell you everything to say. We just need you to be convincing and lead her out. Just remember what we taught you. I'll be right across the street and ready to go in and get you out if things go poorly."

"I know." Miyuki said. "Get her, get outside, find the police. Should be easy."

"Just make sure she keeps the narrative that it was the Nakano-Kai that kidnapped her. I still rely on Yoshida to protect Ai, so we can't let the police, or her family interfere with Yoshida." Eren reminded him.

"Right, or you kill my sister." Miyuki said.

"Da." Sergei said with a slight chuckle, amused that Miyuki was that worried about his lie.

"We don't need to do that." Eren said. "Once you save her, you can go back to your normal life."

"Ok." Miyuki said.

He took a few deep breaths as Sergei pulled up the street from the night club. His heart was racing and he felt terrified at the idea of having to do this.

He mentally pictured Shinomiya in his head, imagining her sweet and kind smile, or her narrowed eyes when she would try to one up him in their little battles of wits. He imagined her embarrassed when he would do something to get her to admit her feelings and her face of complete joy when she got her new cell phone.

Then, he imagined her in danger. Her eyes wide with corporeal fear for her own life or abused by criminals who would harm her. He imagined her crying and begging to be released, only to be met with anger or torture.

His heart, which was heavy with fear, turned to anger as he imagined her beautiful face contorted in fear. He had to be strong to save her, no matter what.

"I'll be across the street, Sergei will drive a few miles away to keep himself cleared." Eren said. "If anything happens, I'll be listening in with my own phone. So, I'll be able to react quickly."

"Right." Miyuki said. "I'm ready."

Miyuki stepped out of the back of the van and looked around for a moment, hearing Eren and Sergei drive away after dropping him off.

Miyuki cautiously made his way to the night club, looking around at every little movement he saw. His paranoid mind made him think that there was danger at every corner, which seriously freaked him out. He walked with a bit more rigidity than he would have liked since he was nervous but kept it under control.

When Miyuki reached the night club entrance, there was a long line of people waiting to get in. They were mostly Japanese youths like him, hanging around their friends in easily identifiable groups. Occasionally, there was a westerner in the groups who was probably from one of the local universities.

Miyuki walked to the front of the line, ready to speak to the bouncer.

" *Back of the line.* " The tall man, clearly a Yakuza, said.

" *I- Et-* " Miyuki cleared his throat due to his voice cracking. " *I endured a betrayal and can't trust my friend anymore.* "

The bouncer raised his eyebrow, considering what Miyuki said. It was a pass phrase, something that would sound like a normal conversation but odd enough to catch the bouncer's attention. Sergei learned of the phrase that would be used to let in an escort to move Shinomiya, so he nodded and let Miyuki pass by him.

" *Thanks.* " He said nervously.

" *Control your nerves kid.* " Miyuki heard over his earphones.

" *R-right.* " He said.

" *And don't reply to me, or everyone will know you have a wire.* " He berated.

" *S-sor- I mean-* " Miyuki just stopped talking.

The inside of the night club was exactly as Miyuki thought it would be like. Loud music, people dancing, and absolutely no personal space. He would constantly get pushed around by drunk patrons and dancers who were dancing in this massive crowd.

A few times he blushed when a drunk woman started to either touch him or even grind on him. He had to suppress his embarrassment since he had to remain focused on finding Shinomiya. So, he tried to push the women away without touching their private areas.

Miyuki did feel a little cool though. Like he was an undercover officer or something. His mind conjured up images of him being a secret agent and trying to save people from criminal gangs. He knew it was childish, but he tried to find a way to calm himself down.

Miyuki reached a door that said "Employees Only", which Sergei said would lead to the underground storage area that Shinomiya was hidden.

He descended down the stairs and ran into a concrete hallway that was fully lit up. The walls were white plastered paint over concrete with exposed piping on the ceiling, making it look like something out of a horror movie. He got worried, but again had to control his breathing.

After walking down for a while, he saw a nicely dressed Yakuza guard in front of a door to his right.

" *You my replacement?* " The guard asked?

" *Huh?* " Miyuki asked, not expecting the guard to address him.

" *I was told I would be replaced ten minutes ago, is that why you're here?* " He asked again.

" *Go with it Miyuki.* " Serge said over the earphones. " *It's a good excuse. Say they couldn't find the original guy and picked you.* "

" *W-well, you see-* " He stuttered. " *The other guy isn't around, s-so I'm sent to guard.* "

Miyuki heard Sergei sigh on the other end, annoyed that Miyuki was unable to speak without stuttering in this situation.

" *Finally.* " The guard said. "I am getting annoyed watching the brats." Brats? Plural? "I'll head upstairs for a drink. Want me to bring you anything?"

" *N-no. I'm ok.* " Miyuki said as Sergei told him what to say.

" *You'll be ok, right?* " He asked, raising his eyebrow.

" *Da.* " Miyuki said.

" *Don't repeat exactly what I say you idiot!* " Sergei yelled over the phone.

" *What?* " The guard asked.

" *I mean, yea. I got it. It's just some rich girl, r-right?* " Miyuki repeated Sergei's words.

" *I get you are young kid, but two things. One, don't listen to music while you're watching them.* " He said. " *Two, absolutely no touching either of them.* "

" *Touching?* " Miyuki asked.

" *I don't care how cute you find them, absolutely no touching. Rich girl is too dangerous to damage, and the other girl is more expensive untouched. If you do touch one of them, Oyabun will end you.* " He said.

" *R-right. N-no touching. Got it.* " He said.

Miyuki wondered who the other one was. He guessed she was some girl who got dragged away like Shinomiya. He was worried for that

poor girl and wondered if he could help her too.

" *Why would she be more expensive?* " He asked.

" *Oyabun didn't intend to grab her, so he's planning to get rid of her in some auction tonight.* " He said.

" *A-auction?* " Miyuki asked, horrified.

" *Calm down kid.* " Sergei said. " *Don't make it sound like you don't know, just remain neutral.* "

" *Anyway, I'm heading up for a drink. Just remember what I said.* " He walked away.

Miyuki had to calm himself. The thought of these men putting their hands on Shinomiya nearly sent him over the edge. He was going to kill them if he ever got the chance.

After making sure the coast was clear, Miyuki turned towards the door. Luckily, it wasn't locked so he took the gamble and went inside. Inside was an empty room with two doors on either side, probably for Shinomiya and the other girl.

He went to the door on the left, opening it up. He heard a camera above the entry way move around, so as to fully scan and monitor the makeshift prison room.

Miyuki almost gasped when he looked inside and saw Shinomiya. Her hair, which was almost always expertly styled up was down and a complete mess. She wore a tank top that was probably from her uniform as well as just her white panties. There was a blindfold on her eyes and leather cuffs with padlocks on her wrists, which secured them in front of her.

She heard Miyuki entered and perked up with a gasp, clearly scared. She whined lowly, clearly trying to make herself as small as possible. She shook, terrified of Miyuki's presence.

He barely could contain himself. The only time he ever wanted to see Shinomiya scared was through embarrassment during their little mind games with each other. This was a primal fear, a corporeal fear for her own life. He felt angry.

He knelt down to try and remove her blindfold.

" *No!* " She screamed, scooting away from him. " *Don't take it off! Please!* "

" *Shinomiya.* " He tried to say gently.

" *If you do, they'll kill Hayasaka!* " Hayasaka? Her maid? " *I said I'd be good, please stop! I don't want her to hurt anymore!* "

Hayasaka, her maid and the woman who tried to go out on a date with him. He remembered when he helped her with getting computer parts, or amazing her with his singing voice when they went to karaoke. She was here too?

" *Shinomiya, it's me.* " He said, sliding the blindfold off.

" *No!* " She tried to stop him.

Her eyes widened as she saw Miyuki's face, completely shocked and surprised that he was here. She had no words that came to her mind, though her fear was replaced with a kind of relief.

" *President?* " She asked.

" *I'm here.* " He said. " *I promise I'll save you.* "

" *H-how did you find me?* " She asked.

" *Remember when we saw the moon together?* " He asked.

" *Y-yea.* " She stuttered.

" *I told you I wouldn't hesitate to rip you from the moon.* "

Kaguya blushed, amazed at his boldness. He was truly amazing. She felt like she would melt in his arms, the past two weeks of fear replaced with a sense of hope and safety.

" *Is this really the time to woo your girl?* " Sergei asked, overhearing the conversation.

" *Hayasaka!* " Shinomiya said.

" *Is she in the other room?* " Miyuki asked.

" *Yea, she is.* " Kaguya said. " *We need to get her too.* "

" *Ok, let's get her too.* " Miyuki said.

Luckily, Shinomiya wasn't tied to anything, only her wrists were tied since they probably thought a young teenage girl would be unable to escape on her own. Miyuki helped her up and started to walk her to the door. He couldn't remove her cuffs, so he decided to just continue on.

Miyuki cautiously opened the door into the main room. He glanced around and made sure there were no other people that decided to come in. He had to move fast to save Hayasaka.

Miyuki and Kaguya entered into the second room and Miyuki almost vomited at what he saw.

Hayasaka was laying down much in the same way Kaguya was. She was also dressed in a tank top and panties, though unlike Shinomiya, she had actual hand cuffs on. Miyuki noticed that her wrists were raw from them rubbing and guessed that Shinomiya was given leather restraints in order to minimize any potential damage.

The thing he noticed was how bruised she was. Miyuki guessed that Shinomiya was forced to comply with their demands by hurting Hayasaka. Since they needed to ensure Shinomiya was unharmed,

they must have used her to force Shinomiya to comply and listen to their orders.

He felt bad for her. She was just a maid and very sweet girl. Hayasaka didn't deserve this. Especially with what he overheard, about them planning to sell her. He couldn't imagine.

" *Hey, Hayasaka.* " Miyuki whispered as he went up to her.

Suddenly, Hayasaka swung her legs around and got his head into a leg lock. While in the lock, she swung the hand cuffs around his neck and started to choke him. Miyuki tried to struggle, but he was so surprised that he couldn't react before she had him in a lock.

" *I'm not letting you bastards sell me!* " She yelled, tightening the grip on his neck.

" *Hayasaka!* " Shinomiya screamed. " *That's the president!* "

" *S-shirogane?* " She asked in shock. " *My lady! You're ok!* "

" *I'm fine Hayasaka.* " Shinomiya started tearing up. " *I'm so glad you're ok. I'm so sorry, I'm sorry you had to get hurt because of me.* "

" *It's not your fault my lady.* " Hayasaka. " *They are the ones who hit me, not you.* "

" *C-choking!* " Miyuki tried to say, still very much being choked.

" *Oh, sorry.* " Hayasaka said as she relaxed her grip on his neck.

Miyuki took a few deep breaths before trying to calm down. He felt like he was dying when Hayasaka did that, no doubt her training and physical fitness helped out with that. Unfortunately, she was still a very small girl around a group of men, so she could never hope to overpower them no matter how strong or skilled she was.

" *How did you find us?* " Hayasaka asked. " *And you got tattoos?* "

" *They're fake.* " Miyuki said. " *I just needed to pose to get in here and get you out.* "

" *How though.* " Hayasaka asked. " *Are there police here?* "

" *No, not exactly.* " Miyuki laughed nervously.

" *Then who is here?* " She asked again.

" *Well, remember Eren, Hoshino Ai's friend?* " He said.

" *Wait!* " Shinomiya yelled out. " *He's the Akuma No Ko, isn't he? He's the reason we're trapped here.* "

" *No.* " He shook his head. " *Eren didn't kidnap you, he's being manipulated through Ai.* "

" *What?* " Hayasaka asked.

" *They're using her against him. He's forced to work for him.* " He said.

" *Why didn't you go to the police?* " Hayasaka asked.

" *Because...* " He didn't want to think about it. " *Eren's boss is threatening my sister.* "

Hayasaka and Shinomiya both looked at each other in worry. Why was this happening to them? They're just high school students and want nothing to do with the fighting that was going on here.

" *We need to leave; we can figure this out later.* " Miyuki said.

" *Yes, but how?* " Hayasaka asked.

" *We just need to get on the street and find a cop, so I'm just going to pretend to do a prisoner escort.* " Miyuki said.

" *Ok.* " Shinomiya said. " *I-I trust you President.* "

" *Don't worry Shinomiya, I'll protect you.* " He said as he looked confidently at her.

Shinomiya blushed, barely able to contain the flood of emotions that she was processing so far. Between his smooth and confident attitude, the fear of being confined by criminals for two weeks, and her maid and friend being hurt because of her, Shinomiya was very emotionally confused.

He quickly replaced the blindfold on both women, knowing that since they had to keep it on at all times, it would be more convincing for them to escape if they continued to look the part.

He grabbed the chains that were connected to their wrist restraints and started pulling them lightly, trying to sell that he was a slaver or criminal.

" *M-move women.* " He stuttered.

" *Very convincing.* " Sergei said sarcastically over the phone. " *I'm sure you'll do just fine if confronted.* "

" *Shut up.* " He whispered.

" *What?* " Shinomiya asked.

" *Nothing, just talking over the phone.* " He said. " *I'm working with a Russian guy who's walking me through this.* "

"... *What?* " Hayasaka asked.

" *Never mind, let's just move.* " He said.

He walked carefully back down the hall, hoping to reach a door leading to the outside before anything could happen. He moved slowly since Hayasaka and Shinomiya were both blindfolded and had trouble walking. Additionally, they were both bare foot so any small rock or pebble they stepped on made them stumble.

He had her now. Shinomiya was almost safe. He just had to keep moving and get to the exit, then they were safe.

" *Hey, you there.* " A voice called over.

" *Crap.* " Miyuki said to himself.

" *Calm down kid.* " Sergei said. " *Just repeat after me.* "

" *W-what's going to h-happen to us?* " Shinomiya asked in a tone riddled with fear.

" *Nothing.* " Miyuki whispered back. " *I promise I'll protect you.* "

As the man walked up to him, he noticed that he had a shaven bald head and tattoos all over him, dressed in a nice pair of black slacks and an unbuttoned white shirt. He looked a few years older than Miyuki, maybe late twenties.

" *H-hey- uh... sir.* " Miyuki tried to say.

" *Just call me Raido.* " The man said.

" *Understood.* " Miyuki said.

" *Where are you taking rich girl?* " He asked.

Miyuki paused for a second, having to listen to Sergei's response then try to regurgitate it word for word. Sergei even acted out the specific tone he'd have to give in the response.

" *The boss wanted to move the girls.* " He said. " *Something about a possible information leak, that's all I know. Now Shr-* " Miyuki paused for a moment.

" *I said to shrug, do the action! Don't repeat everything exactly you idiot!* " Sergei yelled. " *Common sense!* "

" *Why didn't Oyabun call me?* " Raido asked.

" *I don't know.* " He said. " *I'm just told what to do.* " Miyuki shrugged.

" *Rich girl I get, but blonde girl? I know for a fact that she's getting sold.* " He raised his eyebrow.

Shinomiya reached out to Hayasaka's hand, giving it a gentle squeeze, worried about her friends safety.

" *Careful kid.* " Sergei said. " *He's suspicious. Get ready to run.* "

" *I don't know.* " Miyuki shrugged, defaulting to just being a low paid lacky as his cover story.

" *So, one last thing.* " Raido said. " *Why didn't the rich girl freak out when I just said we're selling her friend, she's not supposed to know, and she should be begging right now.* " He smirked, making Miyuki worried. " *If I was her, the only reason that I wouldn't be screaming right now is if I believed I was being rescued.* "

Crap...

" *Water bottle!* " Miyuki yelled, getting the water bottle from his jacket and flipping it into Raido's face.

The sudden action surprised Raido for a moment but started to piss him off when he saw the trio of teens sprinting down the hall to escape.

" *Get back here!* " He gave chase.

Miyuki sprinted as fast as he could, almost dragging both girls behind him, who both took off their blindfolds since it was useless now. They needed to escape and fast.

" *We need Eren!* " He yelled into the phone.

Eren ran into the club, brushing right past a few teens and the bouncer. All who got out of his way since he was dressed up fully like

a cop.

Eren unfurled the shield, making it look like a large round flower pattern disk that covered a good bit of his arm and upper body. His small machine gun was at the ready and loaded with hollow point bullets.

Eren moved past the crowd, unable to properly tell them to move without really knowing any Japanese. The shield was a little awkward to use, but it was simple.

He saw movement to his left and brought the shield up, absorbing the impact of the Yakuza's bullets as they shot at him. He felt like his arm was hit with a stick as he struggled to absorb the impact. Party goers noticed the shooting and started to run away.

At first only a few started, but soon the entire crowd would be in a panic.

Eren took his gun and gave a small, controlled burst at the Yakuza, aiming carefully so as not to hit anyone else. He went down in an instant, dead from multiple shots in his head and torso.

Another Yakuza member crashed into him from behind, almost taking him off his feet. Eren planted himself and elbowed him in the face with his gun arm. Eren spun around and punched him with the edge of his shield, knocking him out instantly.

Eren had to move quick.

Once the crowd started to thin out, Yakuza members from the upper floors were confident enough to take shots at him without hitting the crowd. Eren raised his shield and took the impact, gritting his teeth as the pistol rounds made his arm numb from the constant hits.

He ran to the door that Miyuki said he went through, almost hopping down the stairs as he reached the bottom of the stairs into a hallway.

Eren turned left and sprinted in the direction that Miyuki would have gone.

Eren pushed past a pair of slightly opened doors, coming into a car storage place and watching Miyuki getting punched and kicked by Raido. Kaguya and a blonde girl, Hayasaka he remembered, were sitting on the ground. Kaguya paralyzed by fear and Hasaka holding her cheek from being hit. Eren didn't realize Raido would be here and felt bad that he was.

Raido turned towards Eren, a raised eyebrow at the supposed police officer. Eren knew he didn't see through the disguise.

"Sorry Raido." Eren said to himself.

Eren shot a burst right at Raido, killing him instantly like the previous guard.

"Eren!" Miyuki yelled out, getting up off the ground.

"Don't use my name here." Eren chastised him.

"Sorry." Miyuki said.

"We need to get out of-" Eren was tackled from behind.

Five Yakuza members piled onto Eren, pinning him to the ground and trying to wrestle away his weapons. One member, a sixth one, walked slightly behind and smirked when he saw Miyuki.

"Eto..." Miyuki said.

The gang member charged, going after Miyuki. Miyuki knew that if he lost this fight, both Kaguya and Hayasaka would be in danger. He needed to help Eren fight these guys off, even if it was a six on two fight.

The man swung a punch, but Miyuki dodged, now a bit more familiar with getting hit. That Raido guy was the first time Miyuki got punched

in the face. He was dazed and disoriented at first, but hearing Shinomiya scream immediately brought him back into focus.

Despite never fighting, Miyuki was very physically fit for his age. He excelled in most sports. Ok... he didn't excel, but he tried hard enough where he was able to at least have some level of physical strength.

He ducked under the punch and did his own punch back at the gang member. His knuckle hurt from the hit, but it was enough to stagger him, no doubt he got lucky that the guy underestimated him. When he fell to the ground, Miyuki started to kick him in the head, hoping to knock him unconscious.

After a few moments, the man was unconscious. Miyuki won his first, well, technically second fight. Now he needed to help Eren.

"Let's get into the car." Eren walked by him, leaving a pile of five dead and bleeding Yakuza members. "Is he dead?" Eren asked him.

"Huh?" Miyuki asked.

Eren took a pistol out and shot the man he knocked out in the face, executing him in cold blood. Now that he thought about it, he heard Eren executing the men he beat up while he was fighting, but Miyuki was too focused on the fight to even register it.

"G-good job?" Miyuki said.

He just watched a man die in front of him. Going to have to process that later.

"Get in." Eren said as he walked over to the nearest car, a simple small car.

Kaguya and Hayasaka both got in the back, while Miyuki got in the passenger seat. Eren looked around, hoping to see if there were any of those keys that Miyako would use.

"Here." Miyuki said, opening the sun visor and a pair of keys came out.

"Good." Eren said, taking the keys.

"They're here!" Kaguya yelled.

Eren looked over and saw Yakuza members with small machine guns, moving slowly and cautiously towards them. He had maybe thirty seconds before they were close enough to shoot them without risking Kaguya's safety.

Eren took the key and looked at the spot Miyako would always put it. There was a small keyhole so he inserted it and twisted it. The lights turned on, but the car didn't do that starting sound like normal.

"Is it on?" Miyuki asked.

"It didn't work." Eren said.

He turned the key, took it out, put it back in, and turned it again to see if maybe it would start. Lights came on, but the sound of it starting still didn't happen. He was sure he was doing everything right.

"Like this." Miyuki reached over and turned it even more, holding it there for a second.

The sound of the car starting sounded through the cabin, letting him know that it was on.

Eren grabbed the wheel and pushed the go lever near his feat. The engine made a sound like it should be moving, but it didn't move.

"What the hell!?" Eren screamed out. "Do any of you know how to work this thing!?" He turned to the teens.

"Do any of us look like we're old enough to get our license!?" Hayasaka screamed.

"Why do you need a license!?" Eren screamed back.

"Haven't you driven a car before!?" Kaguya yelled.

"No, I only know how to ride horses!" Eren yelled.

"Are you from the stone age or something!" Hayasaka yelled. "Let me drive!"

Hayasaka climbed to the front and got in Eren's lap. With her in his lap, she moved a lever in the center of the car and started to push the go lever at their feet.

"Move your feet!" She yelled.

She jumped every time Eren shot his gun outside of the window, capitalizing on the fact that he can shoot them, but they won't shoot back in fear of hitting Kaguya.

Hayasaka drove up a ramp and burst through a type of gate that was only good for stopping people and not a full speed car. She turned on the main road, avoiding crowds of people who all ran out of the club since the shooting started.

"We did it!" Miyuki yelled.

"Yea, we did." Eren sighed. "Good job kid." Eren patted Hayasaka on the shoulder, who was driving the car while seated in his lap.

Without the fear of dying present, Hayasaka blushed at the close contact. Aside from family, she's never been in someone's lap before. Eren is probably the first man who she ever sat this close to or this intimately. It was embarrassing.

Of course, no less embarrassing than what they were planning to do with her. Sell her into slavery, trafficked as an object. Never in her worst nightmares did she imagine such a thing would happen to her.

"So... you're the Akuma No Ko." Kaguya said.

"How'd you find out?" Eren asked.

"It was obvious, based on our situation." Hayasaka said. "Shirogane here said that you're being compelled to because they are threatening Ai, is that true?"

"I wish I could say it was." Eren said. "I never kidnapped you, nor was I in anyway apart of that. But I joined this group before I met Ai. She's just a convenient thing to try and keep me compliant."

"Why though?" Kaguya asked. "I mean, I can't imagine you'd try to save me after threatening the Kaicho's sister."

"Kaicho?" Eren asked.

"I'm president of our Student Council, if you remember." He said.

"You all were speaking in Japanese that day, I don't even know what that is." Eren said.

"Right." Kaguya said, remembering that he doesn't know Japanese. "So why get involved in crime?"

"I had no choice." Eren said. "I didn't end up in Japan by choice. I was left here with no identity or any legal paperwork. To be honest, I was desperate for food and shelter."

Eren didn't know why he was honest with them. Honestly, he wanted to hopefully gain some sympathy from them so that they would hopefully not say a word about his involvement. But also, it was nice to talk about his issues here.

"So, you were forced to?" Kaguya asked.

"Sergei always said I had a choice and that I went too far." Eren said, looking down. "I guess I chose my own safety over others. Either way, I never intended to stay in this life or hurt anyone."

"But you threatened his sister?"

"Sergei lied." Eren said.

"What!?" Miyuki yelled.

"It was a lie to get you to help us." Eren shrugged. "Why would we risk our lives to save Kaguya here, only to condemn your sister?"

"But why not just-" Miyuki tried to argue.

"Why not go to the police?" Kaguya asked. "They could help you out."

"They'd arrest me for being here illegally. I have to stay hidden and unfortunately, everyone here is digital-" Eren still didn't know what that meant exactly. "-So, I am trapped in this. Especially with Yoshida threatening Ai."

"Yoshida?" Kaguya asked.

"He planned on returning you, making you believe that the Nakano-Kai kidnapped you. That way your father would go on a hunt." Eren explained. "But I can't let Yoshida get the brunt for your kidnapping."

"Why?" Kaguya asked angrily. "Why not send my father after them? After what they did to Hayasaka?"

Hayasaka was shocked. Not a word on what she went through, her lady only cared about her loyal friend and maid.

"Because Mao, the leader of the Nakano-Kai, wants to kill me. To do that he's targeting Ai. Yoshida protects Ai when I'm not around, so until Mao is dealt with, I need Yoshida's resources."

"You do realize that he's manipulating you." Hayasaka said.

"I know." Eren said. "And for the moment I am playing along. But I can't risk Ai being put in danger. Until this battle is over, I need your father to believe that the Nakano-Kai kidnapped you."

Eren looked at Kaguya, almost pleading with her to let the lie stand.

Eren seemed decent enough. He did save her after all, and it would be the right thing to give people a favor for doing so much. But this wasn't a simple thank you, this was aiding a criminal organization. The same one that kidnapped her and hurt Hayasaka.

Kaguya was terrified the entire time. She was scared for herself and for her maid. She also saw people die today. Criminals, yes, but now the dead men in that parking lot was forever etched onto her mind. It was horrible. The sound of the gunshots, the screams of men punching and kicking each other. It was too much.

The President fought like she expected. An uncoordinated teen who occasionally did sports. But Eren was another thing entirely. He effortlessly beat five men into submission before executing them with his pistol. He didn't even look hurt when he did.

But Ai was also in danger too. She was a very good woman, a woman who Kaguya admired as an amazing singer and the perfect idol. She was Kaguya's favorite idol, and she was excited to see a B-Komachi concert.

If what Eren said was true, he was as much a prisoner as she had been. He's forced to comply because someone he cares about is in danger from the Yakuza, and Kaguya wasn't sure if her father could save her before this Yoshida guy attacked her and her children.

"Fine." Kaguya said.

"My lady." Hayasaka said.

"I will let the lie stand. Only for Ai and her children." Kaguya said.

"Thank you." Eren said with a sigh of relief.

"Now, can we please get to a police station?" Kaguya asked. "I want to take a bath."

"I'll get out before we do." Eren said.

"What?" Kaguya said.

"I can't get questioned since I'm illegal here. I hope you'll keep me a secret."

"Fine." Kaguya said, having her limits tested on this favor of his. "But what do I say?"

"Just say you escaped." Eren shrugged. "It's simple."

"You win." Kaguya said. "Only because you saved us."

"Eto-" Miyuki said.

"W-well... President. I-It is only natural that you'd save me." She crossed her arms, blushing. "B-but, at least I know... that if I was ever on the moon... y-you'd save me." She looked down, steam almost coming out of her ears.

Why the hell did he say that!? He sounded so stupid! Yea, rip her from the moon? How freaking embarrassing can he be!? He was there to rescue her, not try to impress her like normal. Not that he ever tried to impress her before, he just-

Miyuki covered his face with his hands, blushing furiously and refusing to look at Kaguya.

Sorry for the delay lol. Honestly, this is another chapter I personally am not a fan of. But I think it kept everyone in character. I thought of going a darker route with the tone, but figured to not go too dark since my story doesn't have too dark of a tone lol.

Hopefully you guys enjoyed.

More of Eren's Past

Chapter 36: More of Eren's Past

Eren sat down, cross legged, at his table as he looked over the disassembled parts of his ODM gear. The gear itself was still damaged, mostly from not being properly stored while it was in his world and developed a layer of rust.

Following the retaking of wall Maria and the upgrades to their ODM, a lot of older models were placed in storage and forgotten about since the military began modernizing. Even then, with how warfare between humans were fought, there was a big question in the military higher ups on whether they should abandon ODM all together minus a potential for an advanced scouting unit.

This model was likely one of those. Its serial number denoted that it was a Cadet Corp model, and an older one at that. Dents, damaged pieces, and rust made it unusable as it was now. If he ever intended to use it, he'd have to do some repairs.

Luckily, every ODM model had a small set of tools that can fix most problems stored in the main compartment, where the blades and tanks are stored. It included different small hammers, screw drivers, and other basic tools that he needed in order to disassemble and fix it.

Every Soldier was inspected to ensure they had a set and was drilled in maintenance in case they ever had to do on the fly repairs. With how poor their logistics were and how expensive ODMs were, it was cheaper and easier to have most basic repairs done by the users since ODM experts were rare.

Eren took the main thruster, which was disassembled, and used a steel wool in order to start scrubbing away the rust on the different

pieces. The propeller fan, which had gas blown through it in order to retract the cables, was severely rusted and had resistance when spinning. He doubted it could generate enough pull to lift him up.

There were also the tanks themselves. By connecting the two hoses together, his fuel gauge showed that the fuel was well into the red. There was still some fuel there, maybe for enough for ten minutes of flight if he used it sparingly. However, if he had to get into an actual fight, the ODM would last maybe two minutes.

Eren considered what his plan was with the ODM. He considered that he could likely use it against Mao in the Yakuza war, or Yoshida if he ever tried to hurt Ai. It would just be a onetime use, since he searched the markets here and couldn't find anything like ice burst stones.

Maybe Eren could find a substitute, but he wasn't a scientist. He had no way of knowing how to go about it since his expertise ends and general maintenance and repair. So, his ODM gear would only be useful as a single use item.

Meaning, he'd either have to use this as a chance to kill Mao, or as a weapon in case he had to fight Yoshida. He'd only have it for a single engagement. After that, he'd be back to fighting normally. He wished he still had his powers, even with the curse of Ymir as a downside.

Knock, Knock.

Eren turned to his door, getting up, and walking over to it. He opened it to see Ai's smiling face.

"Hi Eren." She smiled.

"Ai." He nodded.

"Boo." She narrowed her eyes. "No cute pet names?" She asked.

"Pet names?" Eren asked.

"Yea, couples give each other cute pet names." She giggled.

"So, Japanese people pet their lovers on the head like a dog, and then call them dog names?" Eren asked.

"It's not literal..." Ai felt a sweat drop on her head. "No, it's stuff like darin or hanii." She said.

"Darin?" Eren tried to say, though it didn't sound right with her accent.

"Well, it's borrowed from western phrases." She said.

"If you say so... hanii." Eren tried it out, blushing as he said it.

Ai squealed on the inside, thinking that it was so cute from him. Especially with his blush. He has really been making an effort to adapt to Japanese culture, even if it makes him embarrassed.

Not only did it make him more attractive to her, but she really appreciated his effort to learn her culture. She did wish that Eren would at least share more about his own culture so that she could learn as well. She'd love to learn more about Ukrainian culture from Eren.

"Why don't you come over darin." She said with a wink. "We're having some guests over, so it'll be fun for you to be with company."

"Sure." Eren shrugged. "I'll be over in a few minutes. Let me pack some stuff away."

"Ok!" Eren held up the two fingers.

Eren flicked her in the forehead, making her say a small "Itai".

" *Nani!* " She said.

"There's that idol act again." He said with a smile.

"I think you just don't appreciate the work I put into it." She pouted.

"It's too much for me." He said. "I prefer the real Ai."

Ai blushed at his compliment, though tried to maintain her pouty face. She wasn't going to let him win.

"I'll see you in a bit." He closed the door, leaving her the loser in that little match.

" *Baka!* " She playfully yelled.

"I don't know what that means!" Eren said through the door.

" *Make sure you're dressed up Aqua-Chan!* " Ai called out to her son.

" *We're not going anywhere.* " Aqua said with a bit of annoyance.

" *I know, but Shinomiya-San is coming over and I want you to look your best.* " She said.

Aqua couldn't blame that. It was all over the news and brought relief to a lot of people while also leveraging criticism against the government. Amazingly, Shinomiya Kaguya, one of the heirs to the Shinomiya conglomerate, managed to escape from her kidnappers. The news told of a tale of bravery in the face of danger and how she was able to escape into the streets when a guard got careless.

It brought criticism since in the few days after the event, the police have since reduced their operations in the city, adding credit to outcries of misuse of power by the Shinomiya Conglomerate. This prompted the Shinomiya Conglomerate to increase activities once again to curb crime in Tokyo, which many critics say that it was the Police's attempt at saving face despite the controversy.

However, the moment Ai heard the news, she immediately called Fujiwara Chika and asked if it was true. The pink haired girl

confirmed that it was true and told her that Kaguya was getting checked at in one of the best hospitals in Japan. Luckily, there was no injury.

Ai was relieved and insisted that when she gets better, that she comes over to her home for dinner and a relaxing night. Ai couldn't imagine what the poor girl went through, and wanted to show her that she is safe and has friends that she can rely on. She also wanted to give her a chance to meet her favorite idol.

Ai was far from arrogant; she was actually very humble. But factually speaking, Kaguya was a huge fan of hers. So, she wanted to at least help her recover in the best way possible, by being the perfect idol possible so that she can meet her hero.

After all, it was important that Ai maintain her persona as much as possible. Her biggest fear was ruining a fan's expectation of her, since that may be the one time a fan could see her in person. She believed that it's important to live up to your fan's expectations for their benefits.

" *Mama!* " Ruby called over. " *Someone is knocking, can I get it?* "

" *No Ruby-Chan.* " Ai called back.

Absolutely not. Aqua got strangled and stabbed when he was out of her sight, there was no way she was going to let any of that happen to Ruby.

Ai finished setting the table up and walked over to the door. She cracked it open and saw the smiling faces of Kaguya and her friends.

" *Welcome!* " Ai said cheerfully as she opened the door the rest of the way and undid the bolts.

" *Hoshino-San, it's nice to meet you again.* " Kaguya bowed.

" *Please Shinomiya-San, call me Ai.* " Ai flashed her a peace sign.

" Fine, but please do the same for me. " Kaguya replied. " My father has guards disguised in the area, watching the house. I apologize if you see anyone suspicious. "

" I understand. " Ai said. " Especially after what happened. "

" It's so nice to see you again Ai! " Fujiwara ran up to Ai and hugged her tightly.

" You too Fujiwara. " Ai said, recovering from the surprise and hugging her back.

" It's cool to see you. " Ishigami said, walking into the apartment. " Even if this is a more rundown place than I was expecting for a famous idol. "

" Most idol don't make a lot of money Ishigami. " Miyuki said as he walked in.

" Still, you'd think with the companies making so much money, they could afford to pay their idols a half decent check every now and again. " He countered.

" Well, Strawberry Productions and President Saitou do their best, but there is only so much that they can do. " Ai said. " Most of the money goes into advertising and renting the venues, so there isn't a lot between all of us. "

" Especially with they aren't that popular, Ai is one of the few rising stars. " Lastly, Hayasaka entered the apartment, making it very cramped in the apartment.

Ai noticed the bruising on her, which was beginning to fade, but she wondered why Hayasaka was so hurt. Did something happen recently?

" Oh, Ai, this is Hayasaka Ai- " Fujiwara tried to introduce.

" Oh, we met when we picked up my son. " Ai said.

" Oh, well did you know that Hayasaka is a woman!? " Fujiwara asked.

"... That was in question? " Ai asked, breaking out of her idol persona for a moment.

" I am lady Kaguya's maid, so I have at times had to adopt disguises. Around Fujiwara-San, I was a butler. " Hayasaka said. " Recently, it was found out. "

" Yea, this whole time I just thought she was a really pretty boy. " Fujiwara said. " Then comes my surprise when she says she's a girl. "

" W-well, I'm glad she's a girl then. " Ai looked at Kaguya, asking for help. Kaguya shrugged. " By the way, are you ok Hayasaka? Did something happen? "

" I was kidnapped with lady Kaguya. " She said.

" Oh no! " Ai said sadly. " I had no idea, the news only said Kaguya was kidnapped. "

" And I had a long argument with my father on that. " Kaguya crossed her arms. " I was furious when he never mentioned that Hayasaka was kidnapped as well. He said he was too worried over me that he didn't consider it, but I think he just didn't want to explain to the media that he lost two people near him. "

" Either way, I'm glad you're ok. " Ai changed the subject. " We'll make sure you have a good meal to help you heal up. "

Ai wanted to keep the mood pleasant since this was as much about healing the two girls as it was socializing with friends. Right now, Kaguya, and now it seems Hayasaka, needed love and support after their ordeal. Simply saying she's there for them wasn't enough, they needed to see it through actions.

"Are there too many people, or should I leave?" And English voice said from the door.

"Of course, not Eren." Ai smiled as he walked in. "You remember Kaguya and Hayasaka, right? When we looked for Aqua-Chan?"

Kaguya, Hayasaka, and Miyuki froze when they saw Eren. Despite what he did for them, they knew that he was the Akuma No Ko, the criminal able to destroy a warehouse of armed men single handed. A man who they saw easily defeated five Yakuza thugs like it was nothing.

Now here he was, about to break bread with them.

"I think so." Eren shrugged, understanding that the last time Ai was aware they saw each other was when Aqua went missing.

"Great, I hope you all don't mind if my b-boyfriend tags along." Ai said, getting used to the term after four years of being single.

"B-boyfriend!?" Fujiwara screamed. "How scandalous." She giggled.

"See, this is why idols are terrible." Ishigami said. "Everyone expects them to just be complete perfect dolls while the idols themselves are not allowed too just be themselves. Raging fans that have terrible expectations and don't let the idols who they say they love, experience any happiness."

Thanks for the reminder, Ai thought to herself. Ishigami's heart was in the right place, but he really needed to work on his social skills.

"It's ok Ishigami-San" Ai waved off, though still glad for his concern.

" *Aw, little Aqua-Chan~* " Fujiwara whined when she saw Aqua.

" Yes? " He asked.

" *Come here.* " She kneeled down and scooped Aqua up in her arms, trying to be as gently as possible so as not to hurt his injured arm.

" Why are you hugging me? " He asked.

" Poor little guy is all hurt protecting his mama. " She said sadly. " Auntie Fujiwara will make it feel all better. "

When did this pink haired girl become his aunt?

" Aqua-Chan is such a little ladies man. " Ai giggled at the display.

" Please let me go. " He said.

" Not till I get a hug. " She said.

Aqua never remembered this kind of attention when he was Goro. Maybe as a toddler he did, but he was really getting tired of being treated like a kid. Oh well, he technically was, so no use there.

"Come on, let's all eat." Ai said.

She motioned for everyone to sit at the table and started passing out large pots filled with Miso soup, fried rice, and different kinds of veggies. It was a large meal that would surely feed everyone here.

Ai made sure to keep the topic of the conversation as friendly and cheerful as possible. Anything to prevent Kaguya or Hayasaka from relieving what they went through. She noticed moments where both girls would get quiet, before bringing them into the conversation so they could focus on more pleasant things.

Grief and isolation were an important step to recovering from traumatic events, but just as important was being around loved ones and friends to keep you grounded. Ai learned that a long time ago, right around the time that her children were born.

They always helped her anytime she was sad or depressed from either bad criticism from fans or from her own loneliness.

"So Eren-San, we never asked. How did you and Ai ask each other to date?" Fujiwara asked, causing Ai to widen her eyes.

"It wasn't anything special." Eren shrugged.

"Come on, did you do something spontaneous?" She asked.

Spontaneous? Without a doubt...

"I just asked her to marry me." Eren shrugged, causing Ai to almost face palm at how easy he made that sound.

"Marriage!?" Fujiwara yelled out. "How fast, is the wedding soon?"

"No, she said to wait." He said, unsure why she was... wait, oh yea. "Right, in my home, marriages happen within weeks of meeting typically. It's different here and I didn't know. So, I'm trying this dating thing first."

"Did you guys' kiss?" Fujiwara asked.

"Yes." Eren nodded.

Ai covered her face as she blushed, so embarrassed that her love life is just being put out into the open like this.

"You two kissed!?" Kaguya yelled out of embarrassment.

"Is that so strange for lovers to do?" He asked.

"It's just, you don't just say it out loud." Kaguya said.

"Why?" Eren asked.

"Because... you just don't." She said, not finding a reason.

"What about you two?" Eren asked, referring to Miyuki and Kaguya.

"K-kaicho and me?" She asked.

"You two seem close. Are you dating?" Eren asked.

"N-no!" Miyuki yelled out.

"We're too busy to do any of that." She said.

"Yea, especially with Student Council duties, and the festival this summer. There's too much going on." Miyuki yelled out.

"You two should try it." Eren said. "I'm new to this whole dating thing, but you two seem like a good match. I'd say try it."

"A-a good match?" Kaguya blushed.

She looked over at Miyuki, who looked back. He was just as red as she was. Could she try dating him? There was no way. She knew the game they played. Whoever gives their heart first is the loser. There is no way he would ever admit defea-

"We should." He said.

WHAT!?

"W-what?" She asked.

Miyuki thought a lot about it. Thought a lot about his feelings for Shinomiya. The two weeks she was apart from him was the hardest two weeks of his life. Especially knowing that she was held captive by a bunch of criminals who only intended to use her.

The Student Council room was normally filled with her scent. That scent of whatever premium shampoo that probably cost more than he made in a week. Until she was returned, the scent started to fade, and he was worried he'd never smell it again.

He almost lost her, and if he did, then she'd never know his true feelings for her. He couldn't accept that. It made him realize that life was too short not to take leaps and bounds.

Additionally, Kei and his father would say that Miyuki was different in the past few days. They said he seemed more confident and surer of

himself. Miyuki figured that maybe he gained some confidence after rescuing Shinomiya, and he felt that something as childish as being afraid of admitting your feelings to a girl paled in comparison to fighting the Yakuza.

So yes, he did love Shinomiya. He could admit that to himself. It was too much of a jump to admit that to her now, but at least he could say one thing.

"We should date Shinomiya." He said.

Did he just give up!? No mind games!? No anything!? Just a request!?

"W-well. If you believe so then as your vice president, it is only natural that I defer to your decision." She looked away, trying to maintain her composure.

Ai put her hand in front of her mouth to stop from giggling. Kaguya was blushing. Not only that, but she was also desperately fighting a smile, excited that finally he said something.

Eren shook his head, not understanding why this world was so shy around romance. He thought Ai was just unique, but these two were worse. Was it just the norm?

"You two need to get over your shyness." Eren said bluntly.

"It's not that easy!" Kaguya yelled out.

"He's the last person to argue with." Ai giggled. "This is the man who proposed to me in a room full of people."

"Wow, that's brave." Hayasaka said. Even for her, that was very bold.

"It's really not." Eren said.

"Have you ever loved a girl before Eren?" Kaguya asked in a slightly arrogant tone, expecting the answer to be a no and call him out on

his lack of experience. Anything to change the topic off of her.

"Yes." Eren said.

"Y-yes?" Ai asked, her face contorted in both confusion and worry.

Eren loved another woman?

"Really? Who?" Fujiwara asked.

Eren looked down in sadness, unsure of what to say or how he would even say it. He hasn't thought about Mikasa in so long, not since arriving here. Especially since the last time they spoke, he said he hated her. The last time they met, she killed him.

Ai was worried. She knew Eren fled from Syria after he was forcefully drafted into the Russian Army. Did he have a woman he loved back home? A woman he gave up on because he couldn't return home. If he could return home, would he leave her for this woman?

"I knew her since we were little." Eren said.

Oh no. A childhood friend. How can Ai compete with that!? She knew she should tell him to be quiet, that she didn't want to hear that. But she also wanted to know, for no other reason than to know how to beat this woman for Eren's affection.

"My family adopted her after her parents were murdered." He said.

"They were murdered?" Miyuki asked.

"Slavers from the underground tried to kidnap her and her mother." Eren said. "She was... exotic by our standards. Her father was half Hizuru, while her mother was full Hizuru." Eren said.

"Hizuru?" Fujiwara asked.

Shit.

"Our word for oriental." He said.

"So, she was a western and Asian mix?" Fujiwara asked.

"Yes." Eren said.

Ai wondered what that meant. Was Meimei right and Eren had yellow fever? Not that she complained, it only helped Ai attract him.

However, Ai also noticed that Hayasaka and Kaguya looked sad for a moment, reminded of their own brush with slavery.

"That's horrible." Miyuki said.

"We were nine then, I think anyway." Eren said, trying to remember.

"Did the police save her?" He asked.

"They didn't get there in time." Eren said. "Her mother and father were killed, and they intended to sell her to a noble who liked exotic slaves."

"As a nine-year-old!?" Hayasaka yelled out.

"The world is cruel." Eren shrugged. "There are bad people everywhere."

"Did she escape?" Ai asked, feeling sorry for having a rivalry with this girl after going through something like that.

"I saved her." Eren said.

"How?" Kaguya asked.

Eren looked down, as if struggling to say the words. He seemed like he didn't want to say it, but he made the attempt anyway.

These people, they were good people. He felt... better, finally talking about these things. He kept his emotions bottled up for years, and

finally, he was able to talk about it.

"I followed their trail to a cabin in the woods and stopped them." He said.

"How?" Kaguya asked again.

"I was nine, so I pretended to be a frightened child. When they thought they could sell me too, I stabbed two of them. They were too surprised to stop me."

Ai looked at Eren in shock. She knew he killed in war. She also knew he killed people when he was fifteen since he was a child soldier. But two men... at nine? A nine-year-old boy, killing two grown slavers who kidnapped a little girl after murdering her parents? What kind of sick place was Crimea?

Fujiwara covered her mouth in disgust. She heard Eren was a Soldier and could imagine he probably killed. But a nine-year-old being forced to kill people? That was horrible. Ishigami felt much the same way.

Miyuki, Kaguya, and Hayasaka were surprised as well. They knew Eren was a criminal. They knew he was the Akuma No Ko. But suddenly, something made sense to them.

They couldn't figure out why Eren risked so much to save them. He was a criminal, and criminals were bad people. Why didn't he just let them get sold away or ransomed off if it risked so much to save them?

But now, it made sense. Eren hated human trafficking. He witnessed someone close to him nearly get trafficked. And because of that, he hated the practice. That's why he saved the girls. That's why he risked so much to save them.

"The last one nearly killed me, Mikasa had to stop him." Eren said.

Mikasa? A Japanese name. Was she of Japanese descent? Is that why Eren came to Japan?

"So, your father adopted her?" Ishigami asked.

"We were together since then. Pretty much every day since."

"Did you two become romantically involved?" Kaguya asked.

"It doesn't matter if we did." Eren said. "She's gone either way." He looked sad again.

She might as well be dead, the group can come to their own conclusions, he thought. Who cares what they interpret. Since Mikasa is in another world, living a long and happy life, she has no place for him anymore.

He saw brief glimpses of his grave site. Glimpses of her and Jean, happily married, and a large family of her own making. It filled him with as much happiness as it did pain and sorrow.

Ai looked sadly at Eren, interpreting his words as this Mikasa woman dying. Ai thought she would feel relief that a potential rival was gone, but she only felt sadness that she had to die. It clearly affected Eren badly.

"I'm so sorry to bring it up." Kaguya said.

"It doesn't matter." Eren shrugged. "What happened, happened. She's better off over there."

While Eren meant in his world, everyone else assumed Eren meant that after life. Kaguya knew most of Eastern Europe was Orthodox Christian, so she assumed Eren meant she was in heaven.

"Did you have any kids?" Ishigami asked, not understanding why that question was a bit insensitive.

Everyone looked at him.

"What, I figured it's possible." He shrugged.

"There was another woman, Historia." Eren said.

Ai got worried again. Fearing another roller coaster of emotions between worrying about another rival for his affection or another tragic event in his past.

"We were close, probably as close as a man and a woman can be without being lovers. We even had a child together." Eren said.

"You have a child?" Ai asked in surprise.

For a moment she got scared, she wondered if Eren was like Hikaru. Did he abandon a child who is out there, wondering who their father is the same way that Aqua and Ruby did? Would he abandon her, just like Hikaru did?

"Was it a boy or girl?" Fujiwara asked, hoping to at least have some kind of happy moment in Eren's life.

"Doesn't matter." Eren shook his head. "Historia and the child are over there as well."

Once again, Eren stayed intentionally vague and used phrases to make sure they came to a specific conclusion. After all, functionally speaking, they were dead to him.

Ai felt that emotional roller coaster again. Eren had a woman he had a child with. He had a child, a son or daughter, that was taken from him as well.

His mother was murdered, the two women in his life died, and his child died. Ai now understood why Eren was so sad and alone when they first met. He was a man who lost everything in his life and was alone with no one.

"That's terrible." Miyuki said.

"The world is cruel." Eren shrugged. "All we can do is keep moving forward, no matter how cruel and unjust the world is."

Ai looked sadly at Eren. He had such a bleak view on the world, which made sense given his upbringing. A murdered mother, losing his family, forced to be a Soldier at a young age, and fighting a war he wanted no part in. It made her feel bad for her moment of jealousy when she learned he loved other women.

"Thank you for sharing that, Eren." Ai said, glad that he was finally opening up to people.

"It's just my past, it doesn't matter much." He shrugged.

"But it shows how much you trust your new friends here." Ai smiled at him.

Friends? Did Eren consider these people his friends? He had to think about that for a moment.

Fujiwara and Ishigami were basically stranger to him, he really knew nothing about them and didn't really interact with them. Kaguya, Miyuki, and Hayasaka still probably didn't like him considering they knew he was a criminal. Ai and her children were obvious.

"Yea, we could say we're friends." Kaguya said.

He saved hers and Hayasaka's life. He may be a criminal, but he did save her life. He can't be all bad, especially since desperation forced him to get into that life. So she couldn't hold anything against him.

"Yea, I agree." Miyuki said. "We actually worked together when we sa-" Eren's eyes widened slightly. "Saved a bunch of packages at work." He said.

"You two worked together?" Ai asked.

"Our company moved some things from another store, which happened to be Miyuki's work." Eren lied, slightly pissed that Miyuki

can't keep a secret.

"Yea." He stuttered.

Ai was a bit confused, but let it go since Miyuki was naturally a shy person.

"Either way, I'd say we are friends Eren." Kaguya repeated.

"Yea, I don't mind new friends." Fujiwara said happily.

Eren was surprised. He felt... different hearing that. This entire time, he felt alone in this world. He was insulted non-stop by people for his lack of knowledge of this world and had no one to talk to.

These people would never be his comrades, not in that sense. No one could replace the bonds he forged with his fellow Soldiers. The trials and hells they went through together forged a bond that would never be matched.

But these people, Eren felt that they helped to fill an emptiness in his heart.

Ai noticed it. She saw that for the first time, Eren looked like he felt he belonged. She was glad that he was finally able to relax and see something better than war or trauma. He lived such a hard life, so she was glad that he can find people to rely on.

"Thank you." Eren said.

Ai saw a weight lift off of him. Ai wondered if he ever shared his past with anyone. Maybe he didn't but talking about his struggles helped to take some of the worry off of him.

"Well, let's go watch something on TV while I clean up." Ai said, motioning for everyone to go to the main room.

Aqua snuck into the main room after everyone left. Ai and Ruby were asleep, and everyone had left. Aqua took this opportunity to prepare for his next move against Hikaru.

He laid out the pieces of equipment he'd need, specifically the bottle and syringe. He also took Ai's cell phone so he could prepare for the attack. He knew he'd get in trouble with running away again, but he promised he'd be the perfect child after Hikaru died.

He opened the cell phone and navigated to Hikaru's name in her contacts. He went to the message tab and noticed that Ai and he didn't text since they went to that cafe. It would be odd, but he didn't think Hikaru would not take the bait.

Ai: Hikaru-San, I wanted to know if you wanted to meet up. I have something I've been thinking about.

Hikaru: What's this about? You made your intentions clear.

Good, Aqua thought to himself. He's glad that Ai cut him out of her life.

Ai: There's some lingering thought's I've been having, and I wanted to get them off my chest. Can we meet tomorrow night?

Hikaru: I'm staying at a hotel near Ginza tomorrow night.

Perfect, Aqua thought to himself. The perfect opportunity to strike.

Eren, when he told his story, mentioned how he used his child like innocence to kill those kidnappers. Ai believed that the conversation was too fast for her children, with their very limited English abilities, could follow. But Aqua heard every word.

It's funny, Eren and him were thinking of the same plan.

Ai: That's fine, can meet you. Just send me the address.

Hikaru had been typing for a little bit. The bubbles were not going away. Aqua wondered what he was trying to say that it would take him a while.

Hikaru: Ok, I'll send the address.

That's it? Aqua expected more, but it would be a perfect opportunity to kill him.

Ai: I'll see you there.

When Aqua was sure that Hikaru wouldn't reply, he went back into the texts and deleted the conversation with Hikaru. That way, Ai wouldn't know about their conversation. He then blocked Hikaru's number so that he couldn't text back to her, effectively avoiding implicating Ai in anyway of his death.

Aqua looked down to his tools. He wondered if Hikaru suspected something, but even if he did, it wouldn't matter. He'd underestimate Aqua since he's four and won't be expecting him. All Aqua had to do was jam the needle with the medication in his neck and the threat will be over.

This specific medication was often abused for recreational use and typically sold by people who fake the symptoms to get it. With the amount he had, he'd ensure that Hikaru would overdose. Even then, he'd smother his face with a pillow or inject air into his veins to ensure he dies. It wouldn't be odd for someone that's high to accidentally inject air in their veins, thinking that it was more of the drug.

The pillow would also be untraceable as long as there isn't a struggle.

There would be no way to implicate Ai in his death. A washed-up actor, who couldn't get back together with his ex, wouldn't be looked at as anything less than either an accidental death or suicide.

He would like to delete Ai's conversation in Hikaru's phone, but that was a gamble. He hoped Hikaru used a thumb print or facial ID unlocking mechanism on his phone, but there was no guarantee. Either way, it was irrelevant if he did.

There were a lot of factors he couldn't control. He can't control the CCTV cameras around the hotel or on the street. So if a detective was dedicated, they would know that Aqua was there when he died. However, most detectives won't look that deep into a suicide since it would make sense for a washed-up actor.

Even if they did question Aqua, what would they say? They'd never expect him to be responsible, he's four. He can just cry and feign ignorance. He had a lie prepared in case it came to that, that being that his father invited him, and he left when he saw the drugs.

Aqua had a history of running away now, so it was believable.

The final piece of the puzzle is that this would all be done while Ai and Eren were on a date on the other side of the city. That's why he had to wait for the right moment. No matter what happens, Ai had an alibi and could in no way be implicated in Hikaru's death. Any accusations would be on Aqua, and he had the perfect cover since he was so young.

One stab is all it will take to kill Hikaru. Even with his injured arm, he had the advantage. He didn't need strength or size to win. All he needed is one good moment to stab him with a needle.

It was risky, but so is doing nothing. So, Aqua took a breath before going back to sleep. He hid the materials and began to mentally prepare himself for the next day.

Here's an interesting chapter.

I hope you guys enjoy this and the next chapter. I've been waiting to write it for literal months lol. I wasn't kidding when I said I had this

whole thing planned out lol.

Hope you guys enjoy and are excited for the next chapter. If not, please let me know lol. Criticism is fine too.

Aqua Confronts Hikaru

Chapter 37: Aqua Confronts Hikaru

"Over here Darin." Ai called over to Eren.

"So, a late-night cafe run Hanii?" Eren asked with a small smile, enjoying these pet names they used.

"Well, we can't really go to a restaurant that has servers, since it risks exposing my identity." She giggled. "Besides, cafes are cute."

"Right." Eren shrugged light heartedly, not that he ever really been to a cafe much.

For their first official date, they decided to go to a cafe in the evening and then take a walk through one of the parks. It was Ai's idea, since she couldn't risk being seen in public. Cafe's normally didn't have servers, so she could order at the front in full disguise and not get recognized.

It did make her sad though, since she couldn't dress cute for the date. She had her dark coat on and her ball cap. Her glasses were raised above the bill of the cap since it would be weird to wear it at night.

Eren decided to make her feel better by dressing in the same way, wearing his normal black coat and a ball cap he stole from Sergei. Not that Sergei would care, or Eren would care for that matter. She teased him a bit when he decided to copy her.

"What's wrong with it?" Eren asked.

"It's a thing in Japan for couples to wear matching outfits." She said.

"We're a couple, right?" Eren asked.

"Yea, I just never did it before. So, it's new to me." She said.

"I thought you would have dated before since you had kids." Eren said.

"No, my ex and I didn't really date. We had to hide often and really; it was short lived." She said, though got a bit of a tone since she didn't want to talk about this.

Eren could take a hint since he knew she didn't like her ex much.

"Ruby seems to take after you, do you think she'll be an idol when she gets older?" Eren said, changing the topic to something better.

"Ruby-Chan is such a sweet little girl. I think she would be a great idol one day." Ai smiled now, more than happy to talk about her daughter.

"She seems determined." Eren said.

"I wouldn't mind her following in my footsteps, I'd just be worried about her is dealing with a lot of the negatives." Ai said.

"Such as crazed fans." Eren said.

"Yes, crazed fans." She said, though looked down a bit, remembering Ryosuke and terrified of the idea of Ruby going through that.

"It's a good thing she'll have a mother to help guide her." Eren said, instantly making Ai smile.

"Yup, she can learn from me to avoid all the mistakes I made." She said. "Here's our drinks."

The server brought them their drinks. Ai recommended Iced Americano, while Eren noted that she got a small, iced latte. Something to remember for later.

"She has adjusted well since Ryosuke attacked." Ai said, thinking about Ruby's wellbeing. "She was a bit more affectionate at first, but I think she's fine now."

"It's not an easy thing to go through, especially at such a young age." Eren said.

"My real concern is for Aqua-Chan." She said.

"Why?" Eren asked.

"Since the attack, he's been acting strange. He's been running away, tries to be more emotional, and has the weirdest mood swings." She said. "I know he was scared of his father at first, but he completely distrusted him the moment he met him. My ex wasn't great, but I never would have imagined that Aqua would be so distrusting of him without knowing the context of our past."

"Do you think he's struggling to adjust?" Eren asked.

"I think he's scared and acting out." Ai said. "I've talked to Meimei about it, and she said that he's getting emotional and trying to protect the family. He sees himself in that role and wants to protect me and Ruby. Which is why he tried to stop that Yakuza guy."

"He's a strong kid." Eren said. "To be honest, I think he reminds me of myself as a kid."

"That's why I'm concerned." Ai said, though realized that must have sounded offensive. "I mean, what I meant to say was-"

"Don't worry about it." Eren shrugged. "By this world's standard, I lived a hard life."

"This world?" Ai cocked an eyebrow.

"Country, I mean." He said, catching himself.

"I'm just worried about him. I'm worried he'll grow up angry and alone. Especially if something bad happens to him." She said in a concerned voice.

"My mother felt very much the same." Eren said in understanding.

"How did you get over it Eren?" Ai asked.

"Over it?" Eren asked.

"I just... if my son is going down that same path, how do I help him through it? How do I make sure he grows up without going down an angry path? What did you do?" She looked hopefully at Eren.

Eren didn't know what to say. He never really did get better. His anger and hatred turned into forced apathy as he was made to commit genocide beyond the walls. His cruelty grew worse as his anger faded, replaced with a cold and calculated personality that brought the world to near extinction.

Even now, Eren didn't know if he ever recovered. He was calmer, much more so in almost a decade. But he was still fighting and still angry at his situation. How can he tell this mother that he doesn't know what to do to help her son because he never found the answer himself.

Even when he tried to help, he knew it would end in disaster.

"Please Kruger." The dying Eldian Soldier in his arms choked out. "Please, send my saved-up money to my wife. Please make sure she's taken care of. She's pregnant."

An explosion echoed outside their trench, killing more Eldian Soldiers as they rushed into the trench from the latest failed attack. Men were broken and terrified from the failed assault, begging for death or salvation.

This man here, the Eldian in his arms with a blown open stomach, was one of the few friends he made in his training class during the initial training they received when being conscripted. Stien, Eren's good friend, who would die in his arms.

"I'll make sure she's ok." Eren lied.

He saw through the paths almost four years ago. His wife and child would be crushed in the Rumbling. Victims of a collapsed building as the huddled for safety, begging to be delivered from the hell he'd bring.

Eren knew in this moment, that he was the exact same as Reiner.

"Are you ok?" Ai asked, breaking Eren from his trance.

"What?" Eren asked.

"You zoned out, is everything ok?" She asked, a look of concern on her face.

"Yes, I'm fine." Eren shrugged off.

"Are you thinking about your past?" She asked.

"Yea, nothing important." He said.

That look in his eyes, a look that attracted her to him due to his sadness and pain. A pain she wished to take away. That look was something she feared every day seeing in her son. A look of a man broken by a cruel world; a man angry at the world. A man who was angry for so long, he no longer had any anger left to feel.

"The truth is Ai, I don't know how to help your son." He admitted.

"I see." Ai said.

"I've lived my whole life, fighting and losing everything I've cared for. I felt angry at the world and wanted nothing more than to see it

burn." He said. "Aqua never killed, and I would hope he never has to. But there are some things you can't control. Aqua will pursue his desires and act on his emotions, whether you want him to or not."

"Do you think so?" Ai asked in a worried tone.

"I never knew what was right." Eren said. "No matter what choice I made in my life, I had to fight and kill. That's all I've ever known. All I've ever felt was anger and pain."

"And there's no way to save Aqua-Chan from that life?" Ai asked, losing hope.

"The one thing that Aqua has, the thing I lost, is a mother who cares for him." Eren said. "I believe that as long as he has you, he'll have a much better future than me."

"I understand." Ai said, feeling a little better. "I'm glad to have met someone as kind and good as you Eren." She smiled.

"I don't know if I am a good person Ai." Eren said.

"Do you mean because you killed?" Ai asked. "I know you had to do what you had to do. And I know you only ever killed bad people, so I think you are better. I know you're the kind of person who would never harm anyone who doesn't deserve it."

Ai smiled again at him and tilted her head, truly believing that in her own mind, Eren was a kind person. Someone who protected others and only used violence as a last resort. He may have killed in war, but he only ever killed soldiers. Ai hated the idea of war and violence, but she understood that it was necessary in war.

Eren though, got silent. Ai was wrong, so very wrong. Eren was a bad person. He killed so many innocent people. Even before the Rumbling, he used hostages in that Liberio apartment and killed them all the same. He killed children, women, animals... everything.

Then the Rumbling itself. The total souls lost in the Rumbling probably equaled close to a billion, a number that Eren couldn't even fathom.

"Of course." Eren said, agreeing with her assumption.

He was terrified of telling her the truth. Terrified of telling her the real monster that he was. A man who committed genocide in the worst possible way. His biggest fear, maybe more than losing her, was to see that beautiful smile contort into fear and hatred. A hatred directed at him.

After all, he was the Devil of Paradis. Even in this world, the title of a Devil still follows him.

Eren's senses went on alert as he noticed police walk into the cafe. He had his gun in his waistband and was prepared to fight, even with Ai here. His instincts screamed at him to react, but he maintained his composure.

Ai noticed his sudden look and followed his gaze to the entrance. Two police officers walked in and were heading right for them.

" *H-hello?* " Ai asked as they went to her.

" *Are you Hoshino Ai?* " One asked.

Ai got worried, why were the police looking for her? Did she do something wrong? She felt Eren tense up, like he was going to do something, but he didn't react.

" *I-I am.* " Ai said, scared that her cover would be blown.

If she was arrested here and it got out, her career would be over. However, she was more concerned about the thought of getting arrested.

" *We need you to come with us to the hospital.* " He said.

" *Why?* " Ai asked, getting worried.

" *Your son is there, he's in critical condition.* "

A Few Hours Ago

Aqua felt really bad about stealing Miyako's phone. He promised himself that he would pay her back in some way, but he couldn't have Ai look for him until after he killed Hikaru. Plus, he needed the phone with him in case anything went bad and he needed to call Ai. It was an insurance policy.

Before he left, Aqua removed the safety cap of the syringe and filled it with the medicine. He then replaced the safety cap and put the filled syringe in his sling to hide it. No one would think to check his sling if he was ever searched, not that he would be. But Aqua was paranoid.

He walked up to the hotel, one of the nicer ones outside of Ginza, which Ginza was closed down and still being repaired after the Yakuza attack. It was one of the nicer hotels without going into Ginza.

Aqua had to prepare himself. He was getting worried at what he was about to do. He never killed a man before, yet here he was, getting ready to do just that. He was an adult, and even someone like Eren at nine could kill in order to save someone he cared for. So, he had to do it, no matter how nervous he was.

It should be easy, just a stab and then ending him. It was easy or should be easy.

Aqua walked into the lobby and went up to where Hikaru said he was. The eighth floor, which was the top one until you get to the expensive rooms. He guessed that as a self-proclaimed washed-up actor, it's all he could afford.

Aqua rode the elevator up, having to piggy back off of other people since he didn't have a room key card to enter the building. It was easy because no one suspected a child of sneaking into a hotel.

When he got to the hallway on the eighth floor, he turned left to go to Hikaru's room.

"Of course." Aqua said to himself.

The room was all the way on the end of the hall. He noticed that the rooms near it had their doors empty, meaning they weren't occupied. If he chose to use this time to kill Ai, it would be easy since no one would hear her dying. He guessed that Hikaru would have also used a fake name and ID to get the room since he didn't want to implicate himself.

Aqua walked up to the door, fighting to keep his nerves in check. He had to calm down, he had to make sure that he wasn't getting too worked up. He needed his body to react when ready.

Knock, knock, knock.

Aqua gave three knocks, hoping Hikaru was in.

The door opened slightly, but Hikaru didn't invite anyone in or even look to see who it was. Aqua was short enough that he could avoid being seen through the peep hole, so Hikaru had to know that it wasn't Ai who was here.

Aqua couldn't stop now. He had to keep going and get one good stab on Hikaru. He walked in as he slowly took out the syringe, his thumb on the top, ready to push it into Hikaru's body.

"Agh!" Aqua yelled as he suddenly got kicked in the head.

He fell forward from the hit; the syringe flying out of his hand and went partially under the bed. Aqua tried to stand up but a heavy foot landed on his back, pinning him to the ground.

"I was expecting Eren to be honest." Hikaru's bored voice sounded from behind.

The bastard waited behind the door to pounce. He must have suspected something, but he didn't expect Hikaru to hit him when he saw who he was.

"P-papa." Aqua said, hoping to resort to his childish attitude in order to make him hesitate. "Why did you hit me?" Aqua felt tears coming, hoping to sell the lie.

"Calm down Aqua-Chan." He said condescendingly. "Let's not resort to lying, shall we. After all, this is a rare opportunity for father and son to be honest with each other."

Well, sympathy was out of the question. Hikaru was a psychopath; he probably didn't care about Aqua at all.

"I expected Eren, or maybe even someone from B-Komachi. After all, Ai always calls me Kamiki-San. And after how upset she got at me mentioning a hotel to talk at, I doubted she was texting."

Shit, Aqua thought. He forgot that detail, he always referred to him as Hikaru. And he had no way of knowing that Ai got insulted like that. It was a trap for whoever Hikaru thought was targeting him.

"But you, my own four-year-old son decides to set up this little meeting. Why?" He asked.

He didn't see the syringe, good. Aqua still had leverage.

"Why do you try to prevent me from seeing my family? I love you, your mother, and your sister." He lied, especially with the foot in Aqua's back.

"Because you sent Ryosuke to kill Ai." Aqua said, surprising Hikaru.

"Really?" He asked, taking his foot off of Aqua.

Aqua got up on his hand and knees, wincing at the pain in his arm at having hit the ground. He had a moment where Hikaru was confused, so he had to use it. He turned around so he was sitting down, facing Hikaru and slowly inching away from him, towards the syringe.

"You sent him twice, once to kill Ai in the hospital and another to kill her a few weeks ago." He said, making Hikaru even more confused.

It was perfect, Hikaru was so confused that he could barely react.

"If Ai knew all that, she never would have contacted me." He said, raising his eyebrow at him.

"I'm the only one who knows." Aqua said.

"So, you are the only one who knows something about an event that happened before you were born?" Hikaru asked skeptically.

"I know that Doctor Goro died protecting Ai." Almost there.

"Who?" Hikaru asked.

Son of a bitch didn't even know the man he indirectly killed? Aqua was actually offended by that.

"Oh, the doctor that was killed that day." He said. "I never knew his name."

"You do now asshole!" Aqua yelled out. Did his death mean so little, why does he care right now?

He was almost there, so close to getting the syringe. Just slowly move back.

"Is this the moment you tell me that Ai was secretly dating the Doctor before she met me?" He chuckled. "You look exactly like me, you're mine."

"I know, a fact I'm disgusted with." Aqua said.

"So, you knew my plans and decided to try and stop me at every turn. I was confused on why you would always get in the way. At first, I thought that you were just a scared kid, but apparently you knew. Though there has to be someone else. There's no way a four-year-old can find out all that." He said, moving closer to Aqua.

"That's the truth." Aqua said, realizing his window to grab the syringe was slipping.

"Either way, the unfortunate thing is that you are now in my way." Shit. "And I'd wager a guess that you didn't tell anyone where you were." Nope.

"You won't kill me again." Aqua said.

"Again?" Hikaru looked confused.

Aqua used this chance to sprint over to the bed, but Hikaru recovered faster than he was expecting. Hikaru kicked Aqua in the side, making him slide away from the syringe.

Aqua held his stomach in pain, feeling like he was going to throw up from the impact. Hikaru must have hit him in the liver, causing his body to seize in pain. He tried to crawl towards the syringe again, but Hikaru stopped him.

"Trying to hide under the bed?" He asked.

"AGHHH!" Aqua screamed.

In the fight, if you could call it that, Aqua's injured arm broke free from the sling. Hikaru stepped in his injured and bandaged forearm, causing Aqua's vision to go white with pain. He screamed from the pain as Hikaru put pressure on the injured arm.

Aqua remembered that the stab wasn't really painful at first. His adrenaline at the time was in high gear and they gave him anesthetics

before it wore off. However, since the pain has been lingering, not even his adrenalin could stop this pain.

He saw the bandage begin to turn red, no doubt the wound reopened and began to bleed again. His arm was probably going to take longer to heal, if he managed to survive that is.

"Why do you hate Ai so much!?" Aqua screamed out through the pain.

"Hate?" Hikaru asked. "Is this what you think this is?"

"Why else!?" Aqua screamed out. "Why else would you try to kill her!? Are you sad that she dumped you!?"

Although Hikaru reduced some of the pressure, his foot stayed on his arm. Hikaru brought his hand to his chin to think, think about how he would respond to Aqua's question.

"To be honest, I think I'd say I love your mother." Hikaru said.

"Love!?" Aqua yelled out.

"Yes, in a weird kind of way." He said.

"So why-"

"Because I'm curious about something." Hikaru said.

"What?" Aqua asked.

"You know, when I was eleven, I was a young child actor. An older actress, much older than me, seduced and molested me. I was unable at the time to do anything about it. So, in an act of vengeance, I leaked the information to her husband, who killed her in a fit of rage." He delivered the confession without a single emotion.

Aqua started to realize something. Hikaru was indeed a serial killer, who killed before. It seems his MO was leaking information to people

to do the dirty work for him, leaving him free of the crime.

"And you want to know the strange thing, I didn't feel anything." He said. "Not a single emotion. No joy, anger, sorrow, or anything. At the time I didn't understand it, so I did some research."

"Let me guess, you self-diagnosed yourself as a psychopath?" Aqua asked through clenched teeth, trying to pry his foot off his arm.

"I'm amazed you know what that is." Hikaru said. "I tried to get checked out, I really did. But unfortunately, you can't be diagnosed as a Psychopath unless you commit a crime. And to be honest, I didn't like the idea of prison, so I kept that a secret."

"So, what, killing gives you a thrill?" Aqua asked.

"That's a great question." He said. "I'd like to find out."

"What?" Aqua asked, stopping his struggling for a moment to look at Hikaru.

"I wondered if maybe the reason I felt nothing of her death was because I am naturally supposed to hate her. After all, it makes sense for us to either celebrate or feel apathy at the people we hate when they die. So, if I could kill someone who I care about, how would I feel?"

"So... Ai?" Aqua asked.

"Our relationship was short, but I will admit, she's an easy woman to fall in love with." He said. "You see Aqua, I am a perfect liar. Most people say the words in a lie but very few can fake the emotion. The facial structures, the movements, the delivery, only someone lacking in empathy can effectively lie. At least, that's what I believed." He said.

"But your mother, she's unique. At first, she was a terrible liar. She worked at it, learned how to fake emotion and how to play the part of

the innocent and pure idol. Someone who can love on the drop of a hat. It was something I admired about her. She could lie almost as well as I could. I think that's why she struggled to connect with me. I think it was mostly subconscious at the time, but she saw through my act."

"Either way, I didn't need her to love me. Just for me to love her. When I learned she was pregnant, even better. Would paternal instincts make me regret killing? I guess I had to know."

"Because you were curious?" Aqua asked, finally relieved as Hikaru took his foot off of his now bloody arm.

"Hard to say." Hikaru said. "I figured I'd have the answer by now. You know, when Ai reached out to me over a month ago, I did hesitate. I did take at least a day to really think if this was what I wanted. But, you and Eren kept getting in the way."

"So, you had to get involved yourself." Aqua said.

"Yes, I did." He shrugged. "Everything I tried didn't work. I was wondering if I'd have to do something drastic and risk going to jail."

Aqua crawled, slowly and painfully, back towards the bed. He was so close to the syringe. So very close to stopping this freak, this madman.

"But if anything, maybe your death will be what I need to isolate Ai. Ruby too, might as well see at this point if killing the entire family will give me my answers." He walked over to Aqua.

Almost...

Please...

Don't fail...

Not again...

"Got it!" Aqua yelled out.

"What?"

Aqua took the syringe and stabbed Hikaru right in the calf, pressing the pusher and injecting the entire syringe into his bloodstream before he could react. Hikaru reacted violently, kicking him in the face and moving his leg so the syringe came out, but it was too late.

However, there was a chance that Hikaru would survive. He hoped he would overdose, but there's not guarantee. Especially in the calf, where the drug will take longer to spread through his body and paralyze him. Now, all he had to do was surviv-

"Brat!" Hikaru yelled out, kicking Aqua in the face. "What was that!?"

"A drug." Aqua started to laugh. "An anesthetic, pretty soon, you'll be paralyzed and helpless. Even a four-year-old could kill you."

"Really?" Hikaru asked. "Let's see if you'll be able to act on it."

Aqua was severely beaten. Hikaru kicked and punched him all over his body. His wounded arm was numb and wouldn't move, so he desperately tried to shield his body with his legs and only working arm. He just had to survive, just survive long enough for the drug to take effect.

But the pain was unreal. Never in his previous life was he beaten so badly. He felt every hit, every time his head slammed into the ground. He wondered if his bones would break, hopefully his flexible young body would avoid broken bones.

"You know, you really are my son." Hikaru laughed, slowing down and getting weaker. "I can feel the effects already."

"I'm your son in blood only." Aqua coughed out, barely able to speak.

"Really?" Hikaru asked as his knees began to shake.

Hikaru fell to his knees, the drug finally making its way through his system, fighting gravity to follow his bloodstream and reach his brain. His arms went to his side, but he was very much still conscious.

"Tell me son." Hikaru began.

"Don't you fucking call me that." Aqua said as he slowly stood up, blood dropping off his face from the repeated beating.

"Why, you proved you are my son." Hikaru said.

"The hell I am." Aqua denied.

Aqua walked over to the syringe, now empty. He picked it up and pulled back on the pusher, filling it with air. It was hard with one hand, but he managed.

"Look how easily you kill a man." Hikaru laughed.

"You're not a man." Aqua said. "You're a dog that needs to be put down."

"Oh? But I have an emotional backstory." He chuckled. "I'm really just misunderstood."

"Normally, I'd feel bad. But not when you threatened to kill Ai." Aqua said, rising to Hikaru's bait.

Aqua knew that Hikaru was messing with him. Either to manipulate him or maybe laugh at the morbid situation. Either way, it would soon be over.

"That's right, because I hurt you. I'm not a man, I'm a monster. A dog that needs to be put down. The same thing I said about Airi." He began to laugh as best he could as his body began to fail. "I wonder son, will you think the same thing? Wonder how easy it was to kill a man? Why you had no feeling or emotion? You took it a step further than me. I never actually killed anyone yet."

"I know who I am!" Aqua yelled out, pushing Hikaru on his back with his uninjured arm. "Do you want to know who I am!? I'm the Doctor you killed! My name is Doctor Amamiya Goro, the same man you had your damned lucky kill! Instead of bringing Ai's children into the world, I had to rob her of a son! I robbed her of a normal child because I was reborn as this helpless little infant!"

"Reborn?" Hikaru asked.

"Yes, that's how I knew. That's why I know about you. No one else could figure it out, and no one would believe me. So, I had to stop you. Stop you to save Ai. And this is what I will do!

Aqua put the syringe into Hikaru's neck, any hesitation was not present. He pushed the pusher and filled his artery with air. So much air, that they would travel into his brain and heart, inducing both a heart attack and seizure.

Just as Hikaru's consciousness began to fade from the drug, his body began convulsing. He was having a seizure, and it was working. He was unconscious now and probably wouldn't feel it. Aqua didn't care if he suffered or not, only that he was dead.

Aqua fell onto his back, his arm in incredible pain and struggling to breath from the beating he took. After a few moments, the movement from Hikaru stopped. There was now no longer any movement. Not even any breathing. Hikaru was likely dead now.

He killed a man. Aqua killed someone and he felt relief. He didn't expect that. He expected guilt, happiness, something. No, just relief that his work was done. More like finishing a shift at work than saving a loved one. Such a weird feeling.

He thought back to what Hikaru said. How he learned that he was a psychopath and saw that same thing in Aqua. Saw that Aqua very much was his son, willing to kill and feeling no remorse for it.

Aqua began to wonder something, something he hadn't thought about since he was first reborn. How much of him is Aqua, and how much is Goro. Is it his memories that make him who he is, or the chemical composition of his brain. Did he inherit Hikaru's Psychopathy?

How much of a person is made from nature versus nurture? How much of his sense of self is dictated by his memories, versus the brain of this infant body? Surely the soul must exist, especially if he's reborn.

But what if, Goro is truly dead. Body and soul, and he is really Aqua that just has Goro's memories.

"Who am I?" Aqua asked.

Thinking back on it... did he ever once question if he was ok with killing Hikaru? Would Goro have done it? Rationally, he knew that there was no other way, but shouldn't he at least feel bad? Something?

Suddenly, he felt weak and numb. This feeling was familiar, he felt it once before.

"I'm dying again." He chuckled. "Why is it every time I save Ai, it results in my death?"

But not yet, he had one last thing to do.

Aqua crawled to Hikaru's hip and took out his phone. A screen appeared, showing a thumb print. He took Hikaru's hand and placed it on the sensor on the bottom, giving him access. Aqua went into his messages and deleted the lines of text that he had with Hikaru last night. There, now Ai was completely in the clear.

Last thing to do, he went to the phone app and dialed emergency services. The receptionist was on the line and asked what he needed.

"He-He-" He tried to say help, but his mind and body went numb.

They'd triangulate the position; he knew they'd get to him. He just hoped in time to save him.

Aqua laid his head down, trying to stay awake. Trying to avoid going into that familiar blackness. He hoped he'd live, for no other reason than so Ai wouldn't weep over him. He hoped Ruby would stay happy, he wanted to keep smiling.

He wanted them both to live a long and happy life-

So, a bit of behind the scenes.

As kind of shown here, he's a psychopathic serial killer in my version. Serial killers often start small and get more confident as they kill. Hikaru in the anime started by leaking information, then moved to killing outright. It's a normal progression and escalation for serial killers.

Now, I know a lot of people wanted Eren to deal with him, but that would be way too easy. Not only is Eren capable of easily killing him, but he would also. No questions, especially if Ai was in danger. There's no threat to Eren if he knew and killed Hikaru.

However, Hikaru was always Aqua's antagonist, so Aqua had to be the one to do him in. Not only is Aqua in a unique position to counter Hikaru, since he's a four-year-old, but Hikaru is basically invincible to Aqua without planning. Hikaru is a threat to Aqua.

This also serves as the catalyst for Aqua's own character development, since now that his objective is complete, he has to deal with the aftermath. I want to avoid cathartic moments, where a character is only killed off because it would be enjoyable to the readers. I wanted it to not only be rewarding, but also have a deeper meaning in the story and develop the characters through it.

Of course, this was written before Hikaru's true motive was revealed in the Manga, so I could be entirely wrong lol. But we'll see.

Hope you guys enjoyed lol.

Aqua Learns Who He Is

Chapter 38: Aqua Learns Who He Is

Ai was a complete mess. She was pacing in the waiting area in the hospital, desperate to see her son. The nursing staff told her she had to wait until he was in a stable enough condition to be seen.

Stable enough? What did Kamiki do to him?

She was taken to what she thought was an interrogation room in order to learn about what was going on. Eren stayed with her, but she noticed that he was tense the whole time. She guessed it made sense because foreigners were often treated poorly in the legal system.

However, the questions were more directed towards her relationship with Kamiki. She had to share, but she still kept some things private. She only talked about their brief time dating, her pregnancy, and his attempts to reconnect with her recently.

The Police then told her what happened. As of now, it's assumed that Kamiki took Aqua with him and attempted a murder suicide. There were drugs found on the crime scene and it was likely that Kamiki beat Aqua in a fit of rage while under the influence of drugs. They also assumed he accidentally injected himself with the same syringe, causing not only an overdose, but a stroke as well.

Kimiki was pronounced dead after paramedics attempted and failed to bring him back.

Ai was in complete shock.

She knew Kamiki was rough with her, she wouldn't say it was a stretch to call him abusive. But... how could a man try to kill his own son? Being abusive, she could see. But murder? Filicide? How...

However, Ai got mad when the detective asked questions about Aqua. They said that based on the scene of the crime, it appeared that Aqua injected Kamiki, since Kamiki didn't have his finger prints on the syringe and only Aqua did.

"Are you kidding me!" Ai yelled at the detective.

"We're simply stating an anomaly." The detective said.

"What!? That a four-year-old tried to kill a full grown man!? Maybe he was trying to rip the syringe out of his hand! Maybe he was a scared little boy! My son is four! He wouldn't have been able to do anything like that!"

The detective couldn't argue that. Despite how strange the situation was, they couldn't realistically believe that a four-year-old injected the syringe. It's possible that if Aqua did grab it in a struggle away from Kamiki, his fingerprints could have wiped away Kamiki's fingerprints.

In the end, the detectives found no reason to pursue an investigation. Despite that one odd thing, there was no reason to believe that a failed actor who was rejected by his ex, didn't attempt a murder suicide.

While in the waiting room, Ai vented to Eren about the detective. Daring to believe that her son in anyway tried anything. He was a bit of a troublemaker, but he was a sweet and kind boy. He was tiny, vulnerable, fragile, and weak.

"Mama?" Ruby called Ai in a weak and small voice.

"Come here Ruby-Chan." Ai said, forcing herself to sit down and pick her daughter up in her arms.

She held Ruby to her chest as Ruby buried her head into Ai's shoulder. Ai started kissing Ruby repeatedly on the head, refusing to let her go.

"Ai..." Miyako tried to say. "I'm sorry, I should have-"

"It's ok." Ai said.

"No, it isn't." Miyako said again, tears in her eyes.

This is the second time Aqua ran away. The second time he disappeared while Miyako was supposed to watch him. And now, he very well could-

"Aqua ran away Miyako-San." Ai said. "He did it before, and I don't think he did it alone this time. I think that... my ex." Ai said with some venom in her voice. "Took him away. It's not your fault, it's his."

Miyako tried to accept that excuse, she really did. But the guilt was still on her.

"Hoshino-San." A nurse called.

"Yes?" Ai stood up, keeping Ruby in her arms.

"He's stable enough to be seen, but he's sleeping. We'll need you to be quiet." The nurse said, letting them come to the room.

Ai, Eren, Miyako, and Meimei walked with the nurse to see Aqua. Saitou was busy doing more NDA work, trying to keep Ai's presence here as quiet as possible. After all, he didn't want to risk a group of angry fans discovering she has kids and swarming the hospital while Aqua was in such a condition.

Ai had to control her breathing. She wanted so badly to see her son, but she was terrified of the state she'd find him in. She knew he's in critical condition, and the police warned her that he may not make it.

"Oh my..." Ai said as she walked into the room and saw her baby boy.

Aqua was on the bed, bandaged up and covered in wires, IVs, and a breathing tube inserted into his throat. Ai could barely see him

through the bruising and bandages on him.

Ai had to fight not to cry. Ruby was here, and Ai had to stay strong. Ruby looked at Aqua before beginning to cry and bury her head into her mother's shoulder. Maybe it was a bad idea to bring her, but she should see him in case he di-

Don't think like that. He'll live.

"Aqua-Chan?" Ai tried to say.

Ai sat with Ruby next to his bed on a chair that was in the room. Ai reached out and grabbed Aqua's uninjured hand and held it, hoping that in his dreams, he could still feel his mother's love.

"Ai, I think you should go." Meimei said, not wanting her friend to be here.

"No, I want to stay here with him." Ai said.

"It's my fault mama." Ruby cried.

"No, of course it isn't." Ai said, bouncing Ruby lightly in her arms.

"It is... Aqua tried to keep Kamiki away from us. And I didn't know why."

"What do you mean?" Ai asked Ruby.

"That day, with the molester. It wasn't a molester. It was him. He wanted me to go with him on a father daughter day. He said you approved of it." Ai did not such thing! "But Aqua told him to leave. Said he hurt you."

"Why didn't you tell me?" Ai asked.

"Aqua said not to, he said he didn't want to involve the police since it risked your career, so he said keep quiet." She said sadly. "I should have told you the truth mama!" Ruby cried into her shoulder.

Ai knew that Kamiki tried to steal the children. Steal them and do who knows what with Ruby. If Aqua wasn't so paranoid...

No, he wasn't paranoid. Somehow, he saw Kamiki for what he was. And he hid it from her because he felt like he was protecting her.

Why is her son constantly trying to protect her!? That's her job damn it!

No one said anything else. Ai was unusually quiet, which was understandable since her son was in such a bad state.

Eren pulled a chair of his own and silently sat next to Ai and Ruby, staying quiet until he felt she was ready to talk.

Three Days Later

Eren walked into the hospital room with some tea and an iced latte, one for Ruby and the other for Ai. It was still early in the morning, so he wasn't surprised when he saw Ai and Ruby were still asleep on an unrolled Futon on the floor.

Eren still had to go on jobs for Yoshida, so he had to leave for "work" every day. Most of the jobs were simple scouting jobs and a few assaults on safe houses. It was incredibly easy with the help since it was no longer solo.

The war was ramping up and Yoshida was busy throwing people at problems, especially with the loss of Kaguya, which caused Yoshida to scream at his Commanders at one point. Eren smiled to himself that the smug bastard was getting what he deserved. It meant he had to be careful since he could no longer leverage the police.

Ai rarely left Aqua's side, only leaving for moments to use the restroom or get something to eat really quick. Ruby refused to leave as well, so Miyako had to request a few days off from school for Ruby so she could stay by her brother's side.

Thankfully, Aqua was looking much better. He was in a stable state and no longer had a bunch of things connected to him other than that tube that feeds water into his hand. His swelling went down around his face and his cuts were healing well. The Doctors said that there should be only minor scarring, if any.

However, Eren was confused about something. Ai explained that the detective thought that Aqua attacked Hikaru at first. He said that based on the evidence, it's possible that Aqua stabbed Hikaru, however they dismissed it since it was impossible for a four-year-old to get those drugs or even to overpower a full-grown man. A child his age shouldn't even have a concept of murder.

However, Eren wondered something. Ai complained once that Aqua made a mess at a hospital when he reacted negatively to a drug. He wondered if Aqua could have gotten the drugs from there. Ai wouldn't have thought of it, but Eren's paranoid mind felt that it fit too perfectly.

There was also how Aqua acted. Eren noticed it, how he analyzed every conversation Ai had when she was with other people. Ai bragged to Eren about it, how her baby boy was so smart and aware of his surroundings, but she was also worried that he was becoming paranoid after the attacks he suffered.

Eren wondered how much Aqua actually knew Eldian, or at least English. He'd notice Aqua react as if he understood what was being said when Eren and Ai talked. Like he fully understood. Ruby reacted differently, only reacting to the emotions Eren and Ai expressed since she still couldn't understand full conversations.

These instances by themselves, Eren glossed over them. But he began to wonder if there may be more to what's going on.

Eren heard shifting on the bed, looking over, he saw Aqua finally waking up.

"Are you feeling ok?" Eren said in a low voice so as not to wake Aqua up.

"Y-yea, I think so." He said, trying hard to wake up.

Aqua sat up in the hospital bed, taking a second to look around at his surroundings. He felt like he could barely see or understand what's going on. Why does he feel unusually numb?

"You gave your mother a scare." Eren said. "She's sleeping now, so try not to be too loud."

"Yea, I'd imagine she would be scared." Aqua said to himself.

"So how long have you known English?" Eren asked.

"What are you-" Oh shit.

Aqua was now fully awake, turning to Eren and finally realizing that he was the one talking. Eren sat on a chair next to his bed, his elbows on his knees and staring right at him.

"I- eto..." He tried to say.

"Don't try to pretend now." Eren said.

Damn it! He didn't even realize he was speaking in English! He was so out of it that he just responded without considering who he was talking to. Based on the IV in his arm, it's entirely possible that he may also have pain killers in his system.

Why was he in a hospital? He took a second to think, remembering the fight... if you could call it that, with Hikaru and his near death at his hands. Thankfully, emergency services must have got to him in time.

"If you're wondering, your father is dead." Eren said.

That's good news.

"So, did you kill him?" Eren asked.

What!? What made him come to that conclusion!? He was sure that there was no way someone would believe a four-year-old tried to kill a man. Did the police suspect something.

"If you're wondering, the police at first thought you may have stabbed him with the syringe, but they ruled that out based on how unlikely it is. While you're younger than I was, I understand what it's like to kill at a young age." Eren said.

Aqua figured he would, based on his story.

"So, why do it?" Eren asked. "I know you did, based on how you're reacting. There had to be a reason. Did he try to attack you?"

Aqua figured that Eren would be more inclined to believe that Aqua fought. After all, he was a child soldier that was surrounded by child soldiers. For him, it might not be a stretch that someone so young would try to fight back.

Aqua really considered Kuro's theory, that Eren was also here by supernatural means. He wondered, really wondered, if he should try to tell Eren. Maybe Eren would understand if he was reborn as well.

Aqua figured that now that his English ability was known, there's no harm in telling him. After all, Aqua could just say he was pretending, or lying, or the drugs made him loopy. Being a four-year-old made any outlandish tale believable since he could always say he's playing pretend.

"Hikaru tried to kill Ai twice now." Aqua said.

"Really." Eren said.

"The first time was before I was born, when he sent Ryosuke to kill Ai. Ai's doctor, Doctor Goro, gave his own life to save her. The

second time, he leaked the information to Ryosuke and that attack, you saw."

"Who's Ryosuke?" Eren asked.

Did he not remember?

"The guy you killed, defending Ai that one night." Aqua said.

"Right, him." Eren said.

How many people did this guy kill that he didn't remember a specific person?

"Anyway, after that I found out that Hikaru was the one responsible. So, I acted first. I had to find a way to even the playing field, so I stabbed him with a syringe and pumped his blood full of air, inducing a stroke." He explained.

"But how did you know Hikaru was responsible. Who told you?" Eren asked.

Here it comes, the big reveal. He hoped that Eren would believe him and that Kuro was right in her assumption.

"My real name is Goro, I was the doctor who helped Ai when she was pregnant." He said, no reaction from Eren. "After my death, I woke up like this. I was reborn as Aqua, but with all the memories of my previous life."

There was a moment of silence, Eren showed no reaction.

"Continue." Eren said.

Did he believe that?

"That's how I figured it was Hikaru, since he was the only one who knew Ai was at the hospital since it was so secretive. Then, he did subtle things that confirmed it. He was trying to kill Ai himself since

Ryosuke failed, so I had to counter him at every moment." Aqua explained.

Eren considered his story, not seeming like he was confused or anything. If anything, it looked like he was piecing things together in his own head and coming to the same conclusion.

"Based on how you're not reacting like you don't believe me, I figured you are probably similar to me?" Aqua hoped to ask.

Eren was surprised, but not entirely dismissive of the claim. He wondered if he should try and tell Aqua his own situation.

"I'd say similar, but not by much." Eren said.

"So, you were reborn like me?" Aqua asked.

"Reborn? No." Eren shook his head. "I was brought here, as an adult, over a month ago. In fact, when I first met your mother, I was barely a day here."

"Kuro said that you may have been from an older time." Aqua said.

"Kuro?" Eren asked.

"An old colleague of mine, when I was Goro. She's an academy professor-"

"So that's why you ran away that day." Eren said.

"Yea, I needed to see her without my mother being around since she believed my story." Aqua said. "She assumed you were supernatural like me as well."

"What made her think that?" Eren crossed his arms, annoyed.

Oh... right. Aqua invaded his privacy.

"I got pictures of your journal and showed them to her, she could tell your written language is unlike anything here."

"So, it was you who snuck into my apartment." Eren said.

"Huh?" Aqua asked.

"At first I thought I left the door unlocked, but I'm too paranoid for that. You were the one to break it, I never would have guessed." Eren chuckled to himself.

"Sorry, you were just suspicious-"

"And worried about Ai, I get it." Eren shrugged. "I get that so much here."

"No offense." Aqua said, causing Eren to shrug. "But so, what, you came here from the past or something?" It would explain his lack of knowledge on modern culture and technology.

"Past? No, not the past." Eren shook his head. "I came from... I don't know how to describe it. Another world?" Eren tried.

"Wait, you got reverse Isekai'd?" Aqua asked.

"I don't know what that means." Eren said.

"An Isekai is a genre of stories where the main protagonist gets sent to another world. A reverse Isekai is where a character from another world gets sent to here." Aqua explained.

"Sure, I guess I was reverse... whatever that word is." He said, not attempting to repeat it.

"Another world..." Aqua said in amazement. "What's it like?"

"Similar." Eren shrugged.

...

"That's it?" Aqua asked.

"We're further back in technology and culture. I'd assume we're closer to your World War One era, though my home island was further back than that." He said.

That explains everything. Why Eren seems like he was plucked right out of the 1800s, because he basically was.

"So, when you said Hizuru..." Aqua said.

"Hizuru is a far eastern empire in our world. Similar in culture to Japan." He said. "At first, I had to condition myself to say Japanese, since you are all Hizuru people to me."

"Your war in the Middle East?" He asked.

"We called it the Mid East, when the Nation of Marley went to war with an alliance of nations that tried to wrestle control of the region from them." He explained.

"Marley?" Aqua asked.

"In terms of culture, they're similar to that era of Germany, when they were the Prussian empire, though have similarities with the later Nazi Germany." Eren said, remembering the history that Sergei gave him.

"That's where you're from?" He asked.

"No, I was an Eldian, from the Kingdom of Eldia. We were at war with the Marlyan's." Eren said.

"So, you fought against them in the Mid East?"

"No, I fought with them. We infiltrated them." It wasn't entirely a lie, since it was Eren's own personal mission.

"Wait, how do you know English?" Aqua asked.

"I don't, I know Eldian." Eren said.

"Eldian?"

"I don't know why or how but spoken Eldian is the exact same as spoken English. However, our written languages are entirely different. Don't ask me how or why, I don't know." He shrugged.

"That explains so much about you." Aqua said. "So, you believe my situation?"

"It's not farfetched to me." Eren said. "In my world, it's possible for memories to pass from one person to another. I suppose that if Goro's memories did transfer to Aqua, who has no memories since he was born, Aqua would assume he was Goro." Eren said, thinking about the situation.

"Really?" Aqua looked down in contemplation.

"What's wrong?" Eren asked.

What's wrong? How this almost confirms a fear that Aqua had.

"Trust me, few people would understand what you're going through. I would understand, you can talk about it with me." Eren said softly.

"I don't know who I am." Aqua said.

"How so?" Eren asked.

"Does the concept of a soul exist? Is the soul of Goro passed on to the afterlife, if there is such a thing, and I only have his memories? Does that even matter? My father was a psychopath, and if my brain is hardwired the same way, does that mean I'm a psychopath?"

"What's a psychopath?" Eren asked.

"People who lack empathy." He said. "People who lack guilt or people who don't care about others. It's something your born with.

Something that's different in the chemical composition of the brain. If that's the case, what dictates who I am? My memories, or my biology?"

"Am I aqua or Goro? Am I a soul who stole this infant's body, or just an unfortunate child with memories that aren't his? I don't know anymore. When I killed Hikaru, I felt nothing. No guilt, no remorse. No nothing. How can a person kill and feel nothing?"

"I never killed before in my previous life. Or in this one. Shouldn't I feel something? Anything? Or am I just as much a monster as he is? Will I kill simply because I don't feel empathy? I feel like Goro should be appalled, but Aqua feels different."

Eren considered his situation. He won't pretend to fully understand that situation, but he does understand losing who you are. Eren was disgusted at his future self sending back those memories and enacting the Rumbling. It wasn't until Eren reached that moment in his future, that Eren had the full context of his actions and why he made that decision.

Eren often wondered if he was a prisoner to fate, a fate of his own making. Was he free since his future self made the choice, or was he always a prisoner to fate? How free was he when he was in the paths and controlled the founder?

"Who cares?" Eren shrugged.

"Huh?" Aqua asked.

"Who cares who you are? Are you Goro or Aqua, does it matter? Because at the end of the day, nothing will change what you are. You can choose to lament about your position or keep moving forward. Chose to let this control you or move on."

"Want my opinion? When I killed those kidnappers in the cabin, I felt nothing. They were animals disguised as people that needed to be put down. Did that mean I felt nothing? No, I loved my mother and

father, I loved Mikasa, and I loved my comrades who fought alongside me."

"You care about your sister, and you put yourself in harm's way to save your mother. You clearly love them both. That doesn't sound like a lack of empathy to me. So, you killed a man, he killed you before and tried to kill your family. Why would you feel bad?" Eren explained.

"So, what should I believe?" Aqua asked.

"My advice, to hell with who you were and to hell with who you are. Instead, find out who you *want* to be and do that. If you want to be Goro, be Goro. If you want to be Aqua, do it. Maybe you don't want to be either. Maybe, you're your own unique person who has the combined souls of Goro and Aqua."

"Who cares how it works or who you are. Ask yourself who you want to be and do that."

The following silence gave Aqua a lot to think about. It really put into perspective on who he wants to be. Does he want to go back to his old life as Goro, or embrace this new one as Aqua? Does he have to make that choice? Maybe he was a unique soul that was neither the doctor who care for Ai or the son of Ai. Maybe both souls melded together and are unique.

Maybe souls didn't exist and it's all memories.

But Eren made a good point. Did it matter?

"Is your sister the same thing?" Eren asked.

"Ruby?" Aqua was surprised Eren thought that.

"Yes, is she reborn as well?"

"She is, though she's much younger than me when she died. Maybe still a child, but she doesn't talk much about it." Aqua explained.

"I feel bad for your mother, she has two kids who were reborn with memories of other people. I imagine it would be hard for her if she ever learned the truth." Eren said sadly.

"Which is why we prefer it if she doesn't know." Aqua said. "Not only would it make her sad, but she wouldn't believe us anyway."

However, considering Eren was reverse isekai'd... does that mean-

"You're not Ukrainian, right?" Aqua asked.

"You know that's a dumb question." Eren said.

"What I mean is, you got a Ukrainian passport, which means it's not real. Where'd you get it?" He asked.

"Your mother is waking up." Eren changed the subject as he saw shifting from under Ai's blanket.

There's that feeling in Aqua's gut again, that feeling of suspicion and fear from Eren. He had no choice but to suppress it considering how many times Eren saved them all.

With Ai waking up, Eren wanted to get out of the way before she pushed past him and threw him out of the way to reach Aqua. She was going to be hysterical in a second.

True enough...

" *Aqua!* " Ai screamed as she got up and ran to her now awake baby boy.

Ai went to the edge of his bed but resisted the powerful urge to hug him. He was still badly hurt, and she didn't want to risk further damage. Not with how weak he must be right now.

" *Are you ok baby?* " Ai asked softly.

" *I-I'm fine.* " Aqua said, waiting for her to get angry at him running away again.

" *I'm going to hug you; you tell me if you're in pain at any moment.* " Ai said as she reached her arms around him.

She was gentle, very gentle. Almost hovering her arms around his body, making the slightest bit of contact with him. She was so gentle and careful not to hurt him, but she needed her baby boy in her arms to know that he's still safe.

" *I'm so sorry Aqua-Chan.* " Ai said, fighting tears from her eyes.

" *I ran away.* " Aqua said.

" *It's my fault.* " Ai said. " *I contacted Kamiki, I was the one who tried to force you to have a relationship with him. I'm the one who did all of it. I should have just kept him out of our lives.* "

If Kamiki was still alive, Ai would kill him. She would find him and strangle the life out of him. That bastard, who hurt her baby boy. Their baby boy. A man who nearly killed his own son. She despised him so much.

" *Why did you go with him Aqua-Chan, didn't you hate him?* " Ai asked as she stepped back from the hug.

Her eyes were soft and gentle, not at all angry like he was expecting.

" *Aren't you mad?* " He asked.

" *Why would I be mad?* " She asked. " *Yes, you never should have run away. And you need to be punished when we get home, but I don't care right now. I thought I lost you.* " Tears began leaking out of her eyes. " *I can always be mad later, but I want to know why.* "

" *He said he was going to hurt you.* " Aqua said, careful with his choice of words. " *If I didn't go with him, he said he was going to hurt you.* "

" But you stopped Ruby-Chan from going with him at school. " Ai said, showing once again how much of a snitch Ruby was.

" I had to; I didn't want anything- "

" I am your mother Aqua! " Ai yelled, tears finally breaking free as she screamed. " I am your mother, not the other way around! I am supposed to protect you! I am supposed to go into danger for you! I am supposed to fight bad people to protect you! Why do you always insist on protecting me!?" "

Why!? She was the mother. It was her job to love him, care for him, and protect him. So why? Why must he always put himself in danger for her?

" I... " He looked down. " I can't lose you Ai... I can't. "

And he won't, the threat is over. Ai is now fully and completely safe, minus the occasional crazed stalker. But now, she is safe from pre-meditated murder.

Aqua promised himself that he would be the perfect little baby boy now, the perfect child for Ai. He would be good, loving, and throw away his adult dignity to make sure she had as much of a normal son as he could give her.

" Please Aqua-Chan. Why do you keep so many secrets from me? Why are you never scared when you should be? Do you not trust me? " She said, tears still going down her face.

Through gritted teeth, Aqua leaned over and hugged Ai. She returned the hug easily.

Aqua thought about what Eren said. How the circumstances of his position didn't really matter. The circumstances of who he is as a person is now irrelevant. All that matters, is what Aqua decides to do with the life he's been given.

Whether he is Goro or Aqua is irrelevant. Instead, he'll just be him. Goro and Aqua no longer exist in his mind. Whether he's one or the other, or maybe even a fused soul of both, is irrelevant. He is Hoshino Ai's son, and he will live out his life that way.

" *I'm sorry mama.* " He said.

He meant the word mama to be a sign to Ai as a change in who he was. He hoped it would calm her down and show her that he does love her and that he always would. He swore to call her mama from now on, for no other reason than to make her happy.

Because he did love his mother, and in some ways, he even began to see her in that way. When you're treated like a four-year-old for years, you end up believing it he guessed.

However, Ai felt her heart seize in fear and sorrow. She remembered the one time he called her mama. When he first met Kamiki and asked her to stay away from him. How he called her mama because he was so scared and vulnerable.

Is that why he called her mama now? Was that his way of showing how scared and vulnerable he was? Was he scared now? He only acted vulnerable and even affectionate when he was scared, at least, that's how Ai interpreted his behavior.

Her poor baby must be so scared. Ai wouldn't even punish him for this, not this time for running away. He was too scared for her to get angry now.

" *Please be ok for me Aqua-Chan.* " She whispered in his ear.

She was horrified at the idea of what this event would do to him emotionally. She hoped that he wouldn't be scarred by this event. She wanted her baby boy to be innocent and untainted by the world.

But that bastard Kamiki stole that innocence from him. How dare he.

Ai promised herself that she would ensure that Aqua receives all the love and attention possible. She didn't want him to end up like she did after the abuse she went through with her mother. He needed a mother's love to guide him.

She just wished that he also had a father too.

"Ow!" Aqua said as Ruby hit him in the arm. "I'm still recovering!"

Ai left to go get food for them and Eren had to leave for work. Ai left Ruby in the room for a moment to watch her brother.

"Idiot!" Ruby yelled, tears in her eyes too. "Why did you go with him!?"

"I had to stop him." Aqua said.

"Stop?"

Aqua wondered how much he should tell Ruby. She would understand his situation better than anyone else, but he was worried as well. He didn't want to upset her.

He loved Ruby, she was very much a sister to him. So, he had to protect her as well, but maybe he should confide in her. After all, the deed was done and there was no risk of her getting involved. Even if she did snitch again, no one would believe her.

"Hikaru... he was the one who sent Ryosuke to kill Ai." Aqua said.

"Y-you're sure?" Ruby asked.

"I know, because he tried to do the same four years ago. I saw it in my previous life. I pieced things together because he sent Ryosuke to kill Ai while she was pregnant with us, and recently too. he tried to take you from that playground to kill you."

"W-why..." Ruby asked.

"I don't know." Aqua lied, not wanting to bring up such dark concepts like psychopathy and serial killers to a pre-teen four-year-old.

"But... why do all that on your own?" She asked.

"Because, I was the only one who could have-"

"I could have helped!" Ruby yelled. "Why did you do so much on your own!? I could have helped! Instead, you just did everything by yourself!"

"I didn't want you to get hurt-"

"Well, you failed!" Ruby yelled. "I am hurt, because now your hurt and that makes me sad and angry! So, you failed!"

"You're right." Aqua said. "I'm sorry Ruby, I really am. Next time, I promise to involve you."

It was an empty promise, since there wouldn't be a next time. Still, it's better to make her feel better. Aqua promised to be a better son, but he also needed to be a better brother.

Ruby crashed into him in a hug, making his gasp in absolute pain before she jumped off of him, remembering that he was hurt.

"Sorry!" Ruby said quickly.

"It's ok." He said through his teeth. "I love you too Ruby." Aqua said with a smile.

"I didn't say anything." Ruby turned around. "Don't go developing a sister complex." She walked away.

"Of course not." Aqua chuckled.

He felt better now, feeling like nothing bad was going to happen anymore. The main threat was over and now he could get back to business as usual in the Hoshino home.

"I have snacks Aqua-Chan- Ruby, what's wrong?" Ai asked as she walked into the room and Ruby looked annoyed.

"Aqua is developing a sister complex mama." She said.

"Huh?" Ai asked. How does her daughter even know what that is.

"Ruby-Chan is being a tsundere mama." Aqua shot back.

"Huh?" Since when did Aqua banter with his sister like this?

"I need to double check the anime's you kids watch." She said to her kids.

"Don't take it away mama!" Ruby yelled.

Aqua laughed to himself, glad that this new chapter on his life would be better. He'd work on proving that bastard Hikaru wrong. And he would follow Eren's advice. He'd be who he wants to be and keep moving forward.

This was a fun one lol.

So, we're getting into endgame territory. Get ready for some action, drama, and violence. Maybe one more wholesome chapter, and we're getting into the heavy stuff. So, I hope that lives up to expectations lol.

Hope you guys enjoyed.

The Calm Before the Storm

Chapter 39: The Calm Before the Storm

Aqua truly began to regret everything he's done up until now. Every single time he ran away or fought to save Ai has done nothing but invite this living hell on himself. He was now completely trapped and stuck in this torment of his own creation.

" *Don't move so much Aqua-Chan, mama is trying to cook.* " Ai said as she balanced Aqua in her arms while stirring the pot.

Then let him down!

After they got back from the hospital and Aqua was allowed to go home, he was perpetually trapped in Ai's arms. She refused to even let him move around or walk around the house anymore.

Either he's in her arms when moving around or sitting in her lap while they watched TV or did English lessons. He wasn't even allowed to go to the bathroom or bathe without her watching him like a hawk. He needed to walk and move around as opposed to being stuck like this.

He even saw her browse the internet for a child leash and actually consider getting one so he'd be even more trapped. She decided against it since she felt it would be too dehumanizing to a child, but she really considered it.

To top it all off, Ai finally got a child lock on the TV, so he can no longer watch anything that isn't little kids cartoons. Even Ruby was upset since some of her anime that she'd normally watch was now deemed "Inappropriate" by their dictator of a mother.

Ruby's attitude didn't help, since she was getting so jealous of the attention he was getting from Ai.

" *I love you baby.* " Ai said as she kissed the top of his head.

" *Love you too mama.* " Aqua said sweetly, giving her a hug.

Normally Ai would be ecstatic about him finally showing affection but considering this change in his personality happened after Kamiki hurt him... she felt nothing but worry.

There was no way she was ever letting her son out of her sight again. After running away three times and nearly dying twice, she swore she'd never let him anymore than arm's length away. Ruby got a little fussy sometimes, so she compensated by giving Ruby extra dance lessons, so she felt as loved as Aqua.

She just couldn't help herself. She was so scared of losing him since he always got in trouble so she needed to keep a very close eye on him. Even when Miyako was watching him, she'd constantly FaceTime so she could physically see him.

It was even hard to look at her son right now, since he was covered in bandages and had his arm in an even more robust sling since the initial injury was reopened. He looked so hurt and moved around with a lot of pain.

But, she had to be there to care for him and show him love after what happened.

" *Dinner's ready!* " Ai called over to the two people in the main room.

Ai had on a V-neck long sleeve shirt with a pair of loose pajama pants since she was done working for the day. Eren had a pair of pajamas as well that Ai bought him, and so did her children. She liked to joke that every night was like a sleepover.

Ruby was on the couch with Eren sitting on the floor in front of her, letting her play with his hair again. She giggled as she saw the cute little interaction from them. It's been a couple of days since Aqua

recovered, so they mostly spent time at her apartment since Eren understood that she didn't want to leave Aqua alone.

Aqua glared at Eren when Eren smirked at him, knowing full well that Aqua was getting annoyed at his loss of freedom.

" *One moment Mama, I'm working on papa's hair!* " Ruby called out.

" *Ruby-Chan, he's not your papa!* " Ai called out.

"She's calling me her papa again, isn't she?" Eren smirked at how embarrassed Ai was.

"Yes." She nodded.

"If you married me, I would be." He said.

"Well, not yet for you." Ai giggled. "You still need to buy me a ring."

" *Done!* " Ruby said.

Eren's hair was done in pigtails, very feminine looking pigtails. Ruby wanted to try some girl hairstyles so she asked if Eren would volunteer.

Eren blushed a bit as Ai had to cover her mouth when she saw him. The pigtails did not flatter him at all and made him look so ridiculous. If he was a little younger and still had some of his baby fat, she'd almost mistake him for a girl.

" *Eren looks so pretty.* " She said to Ruby.

"Glad you're enjoying my humiliation." Eren glared at her, which made him look ridiculous.

"It's a look that suits you darin." Ai giggled.

Aqua shook his head in Ai's arms, though he was glad that this little family of theirs could joke around.

Aqua and Eren agreed to keep Eren's identity secret from Ruby since it was largely irrelevant if she knew or not. It was simply a precaution since she had a habit of telling Ai everything and they'd rather not have her mention anything.

Eren really didn't see Ruby differently in any way. Aqua said she must have died young, so for all intents and purposes, she was basically a four-year-old, so he felt the same about her regardless.

Aqua was a different case. Now knowing that Aqua was mentally an adult, Eren couldn't really see how he could form a fatherly relationship with him. They both agreed that it would be awkward, so they just decided to keep an open mind and see how a family relationship would progress.

Eren did have a lot of respect for Aqua regardless though. Even though he was technically an adult, he still had to go against insurmountable odds to protect Ai. Eren felt like Aqua did a better job than he would have in that scenario.

Eren stood up and removed the bands in his hair, freeing it from the pigtails that Ruby made, causing her to yell out that he ruined it. Ai giggled at Ruby's reaction, though it seemed that Eren had his limit when it came to indulging a child.

As the group sat down to eat dinner, Ai sat next to Eren and continued his English writing lessons. Eren was getting significantly better and was able to understand the alphabet for the most part and spell a few words. It was confusing for him, which Aqua assumed that this was because he was learning entirely different concepts for a language for him.

After they were finished, Ai went over to watch some cartoons in the main room. She put on an age-appropriate show and sat on the couch with Aqua in her arms while Ruby sat on the floor. Eren wasn't paying attention much since he found TV to be boring since he never grew up with it.

Aqua and Ruby both fell asleep when it got late, and Ai put Aqua down on the couch so she could get the Futon ready. She took a blanket and put one over Ruby and one over Aqua to keep them warm while they slept. She got a few pillows for them so they would be comfortable. She kissed both of them on the cheek and went into the bedroom.

"They're tired." Eren commented as he walked into the bedroom to help her.

"Ruby-Chan always falls asleep at this time, though Aqua is still tired from the medication he's taking." she said.

"He made a fuss about it." Eren said as he walked over to help her with the Futon.

"He doesn't like medication, but he's taking it whether he wants to or not." She said with a wink and adopted her idol act.

"There's the act again." Eren chuckled.

"Sorry, it's such a habit." Ai said. "I've had to go to a few interviews yesterday and it got kind of long."

"What did you talk about?" Eren asked.

"Well, I responded to fan questions, mostly things like what treats I like or what cats are the cutest." She said.

"That's it?" Eren asked.

"Well, idols are supposed to be cute, so they don't normally ask any actual thought-provoking questions." She said.

"And anyone can ask?" Eren asked.

"Mostly callers or members of the audience, it depends on who's picked." Ai said.

When Ai laid down the Futon, she sat down on her knees and had a thought. She motioned in a scooping motion for Eren to sit down across from her. He raised his eyebrow and did as he was told.

"So, let's pretend we're at my interview. You're an audience member and you are picked for a question, what would you ask?" Ai played.

Eren brought his hand to his chin, trying to imagine himself as a B-Komachi fan and wondering what questions he would ask.

"What food do you like?" Eren asked, though unsure of the question.

Ai giggled but was a bit disappointed, so many people ask questions like that.

"I love any kind of sweets, especially little cupcakes and cookies with cute designs." She tilted her head and smiled with her hands in her lap, adopting her persona perfectly.

Eren raised his eyebrow, starting to understand this little game. She wanted him to think of a unique question that other people didn't think of before in her interviews.

"What's your favorite outfit when singing and dancing?" Eren asked.

"Anything that has a bunny design, bunnies are so cute." She stayed in character.

That was another question people would ask apparently, her reply was quick and instant, and Eren could tell it wasn't really her own opinion. He had no doubt she liked cute things, but her responses felt scripted.

In the time they spent together, Eren wondered if he knew about what Ai enjoyed doing. He assumed that Ai can't talk about her children since that's a taboo subject in her line of work, so he can't talk about that. He knew her favorite coffee was an iced latte.

She smiled at him as he thought, thinking that it was so cute that he was understanding the game but struggling to think of a good question. Ai practiced for years on how to ensure her answers matched her persona perfectly. She doubted Eren could come up with anything unique.

"Have you ever climbed a mountain?" Eren asked.

"Climbed a mountain?" Ai asked to confirm.

"Yes, have you ever climbed one?" He asked again.

That's a unique one. Not many people normally ask questions that isn't related to being an idol or something to do with her favorite whatever. So, she actually had to think, but she immediately adopted her persona again.

"The girls and I did one time as a little gift after a concert, we climbed Mount Fuji. We saw so many cute little animals too." She said.

Eren knew she added that because it maintained her innocent persona, so he continued with the line of questioning.

"What did you see when you got to the top? Did you enjoy the view?" Eren asked.

"Yes, the view was so pretty. Especially with the sun rising over the Sagami Bay." She said.

"Why did you want to climb the mountain?" Why?

Ai actually had to think about that one. She couldn't exactly say that she was compelled to since everyone wanted to go since it could sound like she was complaining, so she had to find a way to make it her own idea.

"Because mountains are beautiful." She smiled, though the cracks started to show in her persona.

"Would you want to climb it again?" Eren asked.

In reality, as nice as the view towards the top was, she absolutely did not want to ever do that again. It was tiring and exhausting, especially in the summer heat when they went. She also finished a concert the day before, so her legs were screaming the whole way up.

"Any opportunity to see beautiful things makes it worth it." She had to resort to a lie since she couldn't be honest.

"Now, if you weren't an idol, would you want to climb it?" Eren said.

"No." She sighed with a slight giggle. "I hate climbing mountains."

Eren threw her off her game. No one really ever asks how she feels in the interviews or why she does things. Normally, questions revolve around their own preconceived notions about her idol persona.

"It's a shame, I'd love to climb a mountain." He said with a small smile.

"You can enjoy all the bugs and sweat then." She giggled.

"I've done worse when I was in the Cadet Corp, at least twice a week we would march with heavy packs in the hillside outside of our base." Eren said.

"I remember you phrased a mountain as giant rocks that take days to climb." Ai changed his line of thinking, not wanting to talk about his days as a child soldier.

"Yea, I think it would be amazing." Eren said with a distant look in his eyes.

There it was, that innocent and cute look that Eren had when he imagined something that inspired him. That same look that she saw at the beach, that look of complete childlike innocents that contrasts with his normal brooding face.

As cute as those eyes were, she wanted them to be more focused on her though. She wanted him to look at her with that same wonder.

Ai sat up on her knees and leaned forward, wanting to give him a kiss. She wanted to kiss him again while the moment was right and while he had that far off look in his eye.

"Eek!" Ai yelled out as Eren sat up and pushed her backwards, getting on top of her.

Ai used her hands to try and push on Eren's chest to get him off, but he grabbed both of her wrists and pinned her arms above her head. His weight almost crushed her and she was almost terrified of what was going on.

For a moment, she thought back to Kamiki and their one and only time. How he had the same forwardness and pushed her into it. How she remembered being bruised and in pain from how rough he was. Ai imagined that a girl who liked being rough would enjoy him, but it was too much for her and partially lead to their brake up.

This felt different though. Ai remembered, that when Kamiki pinned her arms above her head, he placed all his weight on her wrists, causing pressure and pain. Eren though, wrapped his fingers around her wrists so that his weight rested on his knuckles. Ai felt pressure, but not pain.

For a moment, she tried to struggle free from his grasp, but Eren was far too strong. She was completely helpless and unable to escape. Eren could do whatever he wanted with her and she couldn't escape. She was terrified.

But weirdly, also somehow excited. This feeling of helplessness felt... relaxing. Like she enjoyed it when Eren would hold her down and take what he wants.

She felt as Eren leaned forward, and Ai got even more terrified. He was going for a kiss, and she didn't know if she was ready for it.

While they kissed before, she was terrified of where this would lead. She wasn't sure if she wanted to.

However, his kiss didn't come. Ai looked at Eren's face, which was neutral, and he had his eyes closed. He stood there, as if he was waiting for something.

Ai understood what he was waiting for. He was waiting for confirmation that this is what she wants. She realized that he wanted her to go the last ten percent, to wordlessly ask her permission to continue this course of action.

Ai felt that if she did lean her head up to kiss him, it would open a door that wouldn't close. She wasn't sure if Eren would stop, and she wasn't sure if she'd want him to.

In this moment, Ai felt safe. Although she was helpless in his arms and completely at his mercy, she knew that he wouldn't hurt her. This feeling was new, how she felt scared and helpless yet safe and even a bit excited. It was a mix of emotions that she couldn't fight.

So, she reached up and kissed him, causing any hesitation in Eren's actions to disappear.

Ai felt amazing. The glow she felt as she laid on the Futon in Eren's arms was... unique and new for her. She felt so safe and yet loved when she was in his arms.

Both of their clothes were on the ground next to the Futon, their only covering was the blanket that went up to their shoulders. Both were covered in a thin sheen of sweat at the fun they just had, and both were catching their breath.

She remembered that with Kamiki, she was bruised at the end of their first and only time. He was way too rough and didn't really care if she enjoyed it. He simply did whatever he wanted and caused her pain.

She imagined that if she was the type of girl to enjoy rough sex, that maybe she would have enjoyed him. But the truth was, Ai didn't like rough sex, at least not the way he did it.

Eren was different though. He was rough, but never too rough. He started slow and let her get used to it. When he got progressively rougher with her, Ai was able to adapt to it so that it became pleasurable instead of painful. He was able to tell easily when she would wordlessly show when he was either doing too much or too little and adjusted accordingly.

" *Itai*- " Ai winced as Eren brushed her left breast.

"Sorry." Eren said with a chuckle.

"It's ok." She giggled as she grabbed his hand and let it rest on her right breast.

Ok... he wasn't absolutely perfect. He did squeeze her breast a little too hard at one point and she already felt a bruise developing. He got a little excited and slowed down when he realized his mistake, which also frustrated her a bit because she didn't want him to slow down in that moment.

Although even though he went a little too far in that one moment, it was still kind of cute since he got a little too excited.

As far as the second time she ever had sex, Ai felt completely satisfied.

Though she felt a bit worried. Maybe it was dumb to think, especially since Eren did propose, but would he leave her now that he got what he wanted? Would he leave her now that she had nothing more to give him?

She heard in previous relationships how some guys would leave right after sex, or that their relationship would change, and they'd

slowly lose interest in their girlfriends. It was a terrifying thought and Ai was scared to bring it up.

"What's wrong?" Eren asked her.

"Now that we, you know." She blushed.

"Is this your idol act or are you genuinely embarrassed that we had sex?" Eren asked, and although he was behind her, she could feel him smirk.

"Japanese women are supposed to be embarrassed about sex youbaka." She looked back and glared at him. "It's what makes us the best kind of women." She joked in a playfully arrogant voice.

"What does that actually mean?" Eren asked.

"*Baka* means idiot." She giggled. "Meimei said a lot of westerners like it when a girl says it."

"Really?" Eren asked.

"Yea, that and calling your boyfriend Senpai or something." She said.

"What does that mean?" Eren asked.

"It's just a term we use sometimes, though it's kind of gotten fetishized in anime shows." She giggled.

"That's weird." Eren said.

"Or, when a girl does this..." Ai turned her head to look at Eren. "Ara ara~" She said in a deep yet mature voice.

"I don't get it." Eren said with a raised eyebrow.

Ai sighed and relaxed back into his arms. Meimei was so wrong about western men, or maybe it was just Eren. Apparently, none of

Meimei's "Yellow fever tricks" worked on him. She still can't believe Meimei called it that.

"So, what was your worry?" Eren asked.

Oh, right.

"Now that we had sex, you're not going to leave... right?" She asked timidly.

"That's a dumb question." Eren said.

"Eh?" Ai turned her head back to look at him again.

"I asked to marry you, do you really think that this would change anything?" Eren asked. "Don't be a baka." He said.

Ai had to cover her mouth from laughing as he called her a baka. It was so random coming from him, but it did what he wanted in calming her down. His accent is atrocious.

"Thank you darin." She giggled.

"Of course, Senpai." Eren said.

Ai laughed again as he used the term incorrectly. Normally, in a relationship, the guy was the Senpai. Though, she knew he didn't know that. Maybe she'd let him keep using it, it was cute. Like a kid who didn't know how to properly talk.

" *Hey mama, I'm thirs-* " The door opened as Aqua walked in.

" *Eh...* " Ai tried to... do something.

" *N-never mind.* " Aqua closed the door.

Because of how hurt he was, he can't get a midnight glass of water when he woke up, so he needed to get Ai to help. He figured he could act like a kid too since he promised to start doing that.

He wondered when he woke up why him and Ruby were sleeping in the main room but assumed that Eren and Ai wanted to talk or something. They did a lot more apparently. He's so glad he was asleep since he really didn't want to hear people having sex in the next room.

Well, good for them. He's just going to go back to sleep thirsty.

Ai though, giggled as her son closed the door. There was no way he understood what was going on at such a young age. Though, he did act weird, like he knew what was going on. She just didn't know how she was going to explain why her and Eren were naked in the bed together. Thankfully the blanket was over them.

Eren though, covered his face with his hand. He knew that Aqua fully understood what was going on, though decided not to bring it up.

"Get up, I need to actually put them down in a comfy bed." Ai said.

"Sure." Eren said.

Ai had to do a quick little bit of late-night cleaning since she had to change the Futon's sheets before putting her children in it. She'd do the laundry tomorrow through and just get a new sheet.

"You can sleep in the Futon with us." Ai said. "You're basically family now." She said.

"It's ok." Eren said. "Aqua is still hurt and I don't want to accidentally role on him or something." Eren said honestly.

"That's true, I'll clean up in here. You can get your couch ready." Ai said as she finished putting her pajamas back on.

She really felt like a wife now, as much as a mother. It was... a good feeling.

"She's acting different." Nino commented as Ai walked into the studio with an unusually happy smile.

"You aren't joking." Meimei said.

"Do you think she went on a date with Ukraine boy?" Nino asked.

"Probably." Meimei shrugged.

Ai was finishing up her stretches and singing a tune to herself, seemingly happier than the girls had ever seen her. It wasn't her normal act, the girls could tell when each other were acting or not. But Ai was just different from before.

Predictably, Aqua was in the room along with his sister, since Ai has made it clear that he was not to leave her side unless she was going on actual work, like interviews and the like. The girls swooned over the poor boy, trying to make him feel better after his brush with death, though it did annoy him a bit.

"Hey Ai, over here." Ari said.

"Hey girls, ready to get started with rehearsal?" Ai asked.

"The President said he needed to talk with us before we started, something important." Meimei said.

"Really, about what?" Ai asked.

"I don't know, he's keeping it really quiet." Ari said.

"Do you think something is coming up besides the Dome?" Watanabe asked.

"I doubt it, he normally emails things like that." Ai said.

"We'll find out when he gets here." Meimei said. "What about you Ai, how's Aqua doing?" She asked.

"He's... doing ok." ai said, though she was very unsure.

"You don't sound so sure." Ari said.

"It's just, he seems different lately." Ai said, keeping her voice low so her son can't hear her.

"Is he ok? Do you need some time off to take him to the hospital?" Meimei asked. "We can tell the president-"

"No, he's fine physically, it's just how he's acting." Ai said.

"Do you think he's acting differently?" Watanabe asked.

"Yes, he's... different. He started calling me mama more often and he's even been acting more affectionate lately." Ai said, her voice filled with worry.

"Isn't that a good thing?" Nino asked.

"Normally, I'd be happy, but it's such a sudden change. He still tries to act stoic, but he's more affectionate. The one time he has ever called me mama was after he first met... you know." Ai's face turned sour.

"Yea, him." Meimei glared, angry after learning what her ex did.

"He begged me to never see him again, and he was so scared. It was the one time I can think when he called me mama." Ai said.

"So, you're thinking that he's scared now?" Meimei asked.

"Yes." Ai nodded. "He's only ever acted affectionate when he's scared of something or sad. I'm worried that he might be mentally terrified right now."

"That's terrible." Watanabe said sadly.

"I don't know what to do." Ai said sadly. "I want him to be ok and safe, but I'm so scared of what this event has done to his mental health. Especially when he was attacked by his own father."

"I'm sure he is just scared and trying to reach out to get some love. I think it's normal, so as long as he receives love from you, I think he'll be fine." Nino said.

"Being beaten nearly to death by your own father isn't normal Nino." Watanabe said. "He is reaching out, so at least it shows that he's finding comfort in you, right?"

"I- I don't know." Ai said sadly. "I don't know what to do. I'm thinking of hiring a therapist to help him to come to terms with these feelings." Ai said.

"That's a great idea!" Meimei said. "I think a bit of therapy would be good for him, especially after that and the whole Yakuza thing."

"I just don't like the idea of my sweet little baby losing his innocence." Ai said. "I don't want him to grow up bitter and angry, or scared and timid."

"Which is why a therapist is a great idea." Kyun chimed in. "You need an expert to ensure that he grows from this in a healthy and normal way. None of us have had to deal with something like that."

That is true. Ai grew up with an abusive mother, but her mother never tried to kill her. Beat her? yes. Emotionally degrade her? Yes. But never did she try to kill her.

Ai always knew that a parent abusing a child was possible. She lied to herself that Kamiki would never do that, but she knew deep down that even parents can be abusive. But how is it possible for a parent to knowingly look at their child and even consider killing them? How?

Thankfully, since Aqua was so young, he didn't get a broken bone or any severe damage. At least, nothing that couldn't heal in a month or

two. She was so glad he was so young because he would heal fast and his body is flexible enough to absorb most damage.

Still, she wasn't sure what kind of emotional scars this would leave on him.

"Hey boss!" Watanabe greeted as Saitou and Miyako walked into the dance room.

"Hi Miyako-San!" Ruby called.

"Hi Ruby-Chan." Miyako smiled back at her.

"Hi!" Aqua copied Ruby in an enthusiastic way, making Ai's heart break even more at how differently he was acting.

She can't believe she felt this, but she wished he would go back to his normal and stoic attitude instead of acting like a child. It would put her mind more at ease.

"Miyako-San, you need to watch the Ramen." Meimei giggled.
"You're starting to gain weight."

"You damn idol..." Miyako's eye twitched at the bluntness of the young idol. "I'm pregnant."

"Eh!?" The girls yelled out, even Ai.

"You're pregnant!?" Meimei yelled.

"How long have you known!?" Ari screamed.

"This is wonderful!" Takamine yelled out.

"Yes, my wife is pregnant." Saitou glared. "It's almost like married couples can sometimes make a baby."

"Still, this is amazing!" Meimei said. "I wasn't expecting you two to ever have kids."

"Me neither." Saitou said. "It was a huge shock."

"Are you going to keep it?" Ai asked with a smile.

"We talked about it, and yes. We're going to keep it." Miyako smiled as she gently rubbed her stomach.

She knew she basically ensured that whatever gift those Kami's would give her was now out of her reach. Even if she divorced Saitou and looked for a young and handsome actor, there is no way she'd find one that wanted to deal with a single mother.

However, her mind on that changed recently. After Ai and the kids nearly died by that crazy fan, Miyako began to realize just how much she saw herself as a kind of second mother to the twins. If anything happened to Ai, Miyako felt like she would have adopted the twins and raised them as her own.

So, she may have had a few nights of unprotected sex to get pregnant by her husband. Despite his normally calm demeanor, she could tell her husband was excited. He's already placed orders for baby cribs and clothes in both blue and pink, in case it's a boy or girl.

This baby wasn't really planned by him, but he was excited regardless.

"But that's not what we needed to talk about." Saitou said. "I... I need you girls to sit down."

"What is it?" Meimei asked, grabbing a chair along with the other girls.

"I tried everything I could, I really did." He sounded... tired. Tired and exhausted.

"What is it?" Ai asked.

He closed his eyes, took a deep breath to calm himself, and took out his phone to show the girls. Ruby and Aqua walked up to the phone as well, to see what was going on.

Ai FROM B-KOMACHI HAS A SON!

Ai's breath got caught in her throat.

"What!?" Meimei yelled out, standing up from her chair. "How-"

"I tried really hard to work with the police force after Aqua was attacked." He said. "I begged them not to release the incident in a police report, and they agreed to not report it on the news. But dedicated fans have already dug up the publicly available information and pieced things together."

Ai sat in her chair, frozen and terrified. She didn't know what that would mean for not only her, but the rest of the idol group.

"We've had our entire schedule for the month cleared out because people are canceling our events. Additionally, we lost the Tokyo Dome."

Miyako looked down, sad and unsure of what to say to the girls who all worked so hard to get to where they are.

Ai had to stop tears from coming up. She worked so hard for years, her and the rest of the girls, and it was all her fault. She was the one who decided to be an idol and a mother. She knew it would be impossible to hide that fact. Because of her, the girls-

"Stop that train of thought!" Meimei yelled at Ai.

"What?" Ai asked.

"None of this is your fault!" She said. "So, stop thinking like you're the one to blame here."

"I mean, she kind of i- Itai!" Nino yelled out as Watanabe pinched her.

"If anything, I was as much of a risk since I'm a married woman." Meimei said. "So don't you dare think this is your fault for choosing to be happy!"

"It doesn't matter who's fault it is." Saitou said sadly. "It doesn't change the fact that B-Komachi is ruined. And a controversy like this might cost me Strawberry Productions as well."

"I mean, is there anything we can do?" Meimei asked.

"No, no one is willing to work with us with something like that." He said. "Not only that, but people are also piecing together that Aqua was the same boy that got stabbed by that Yakuza guy, which now people are blaming Ai for using her own son to get sympathy."

"I would never!" Ai said.

"It doesn't matter." Saitou said. "Controversies are normally not true, and we're getting hit with a lot of it."

Aqua felt like hitting himself. He was mad at not being able to deal with Hikaru in a quieter manner. He knew the risk, and he was completely pissed at himself for his failure to anticipate Hikaru's plans.

Now because of him, Ai was exposed and there was nothing he could do about it.

"Mama, what's going to happen?" Ruby asked.

"Don't worry Ruby-Chan, mama just might have to retire soon." Ai tried to smile.

"No!" Ruby yelled out.

"Think about it, that means I can spend more time home with you."
She tried to compromise with her daughter.

"But it's not fair that you have to quit because of us. That's stupid.
You're amazing mama!" Ruby tried to argue.

"Ruby, stop." Aqua said.

"This is your fault-" Ruby turned to Aqua, but her voice immediately
died down.

"Ruby! Don't say that!" Ai said to her daughter.

The last thing Ai wanted is for Aqua to attribute that traumatizing
event with her now destroyed career. She refused to ever let him
blame himself. She'd blame it on anyone else. Herself, Kamiki,
anyone. Not him, not with how vulnerable he was.

Ruby reacted in a moment of sorrow, but she understood that if Aqua
didn't do what he did, Ai might be dead. As much as she loved her
mother as an idol, she'd rather her alive.

Aqua felt much the same way. As bad as he felt about ruining her
career, at least she was alive.

"I don't care who's fault it is, and to be honest, I would never blame
any of you." Saitou said. "Regardless of the circumstances, I am the
production manager and president. I am the one responsible for
everything that happens in Strawberry Productions. So, the fallout
will all be on me, and I refuse to let any of you girls suffer for it."

"What's going to happen to us?" Nino asked.

"You'll either have to find another agency, go solo, or find work in
another field. There's nothing more I can do."

It was a hard pill for all the girls to swallow. Some of them had been
with B-Komachi since they were twelve, and now they were losing

essentially what felt like a family. There was a silence that followed, and the rest of the girls were sad.

Meimei would be fine, she had a successful husband and was planning to quit anyway after the Dome and become a housewife. The rest of the girls were obscure enough to where they could probably find work elsewhere. Though without Ai, they'd struggle to get as big as they were with B-Komachi.

Ai though, no one knew what would happen with her. With how bad the controversy was and her previous fame, it would take a while for the controversy to go away. Even then, they were terrified of what would happen to Aqua and Ruby since now everyone knows that Aqua is her son.

Ai loved being an idol, and it was fun while it lasted. But now, she had to survive this so she can ensure everything falls on her and not her children.

Knock, Knock

"I'll get it." Saitou sighed.

He stood up and walked over to the door, thinking it might be Eren since he normally comes over to see Ai occasionally.

"Ye-" Saitou froze in surprise.

"Hi, nice to meet you." The Yakuza member said, the one who attacked Ai. He was standing right at the doorway. "I brought presents." He held up a pistol.

I am so sorry for the delay, blame Bethesda with Starfield lol.

Ok, so the sex scene, I really tried to write the whole thing out, but it honestly just sounded like a porno to me lol. So, you'll have to deal with a fade to black. I'm so sorry if you wanted more lol.

Now, get ready for drama. This will pretty much hit into endgame territory now. Everything will converge and things are going to get spicy. Revelations will be made, secrets will be discovered, and tears will be shed (Hopefully you guys will shed a few too lol).

Hope you guys enjoy.

Secrets are Revealed

Chapter 40: Secrets are Revealed

" *Ah, the single mother, Hoshino Ai. It's nice to meet you again.* " The Yakuza smiled as he pushed past Saitou, along with a half dozen armed men.

" *Mama.* " Ruby whined as she shifted to behind Ai, trying to seek protection from her mother.

Before Aqua could do anything, Ai pushed him behind her since he had a habit of doing reckless things. She wasn't going to let her baby boy get hurt a third time.

The Yakuza members started barking orders to Saitou and the girls, ordering them to sit in the chairs on the side of the dance studio. Everyone was forced to move and soon, they were all sitting in a line against the wall, with Ruby and Aqua being held in Ai's lap.

No one said anything as they walked around, their two-handed guns being waived around recklessly. Ai was worried that someone might be shot with how they waived them around.

" *Listen, if you want money, we have insurance for thi-* " Saitou was cut off as a Yakuza member punched him in the face.

" *Ichigo!* " Miyako yelled out.

" *Easy there, we don't need to hurt them.* " The apparent leader, the one who attacked Ai, said to his goon. " *Honestly, I'd kind of would have liked to hear about this insurance he has. It could help get a bit more funding.* " He chuckled to himself.

The boss started counting the idols, trying to make sure they were all here. When he got to Ai, he had to do a double check. He stared

right at Aqua and Ai held her son closer to her body, terrified of him retaliating because of what Aqua did on stage.

Ai kept her gaze down, unable to read his face, as if she was in the presence of an animal and eye contact would be a sure way to make it aggressive. She was so terrified but tried to maintain a strong front.

" *Ok, I know I only stabbed him. What the hell happened to him?* " The guy asked.

Aqua wasn't nearly so docile as his mother and his sister. While Ruby buried her face in her mother's body and Ai refused to make eye contact, Aqua stared right at the man. He tried to show some level of defiance.

" *I'm actually impressed at the defiance; you don't look scared at all.*

" He chuckled at Aqua, causing Ai to grab his head and force Aqua to look away.

The man took out a cigarette and looked over at Saitou, who also kept his eyes on the ground.

" *You don't mind if I smoke, right?* " He asked. " *This is your place of business, so I don't want to be rude.* " It sounded so sincere that it came off as sarcastic.

Saitou nodded, deciding to try and play along as much as possible so he doesn't anger anyone. The man sat on a chair he grabbed in front of Ai, causing her to visibly shake from the fear. She wasn't so scared of what he'd do to her, but more so what he would do to her children.

" *So, Ai.* " He said as he took his cigarette and lit it, taking a big breath in. " *I'm actually sorry to hear about your career, believe it or not, I actually like your music.* " He said in a sincere tone.

Ai felt like calling him out on his lie, after all, he did try to kill her before.

" Now, I know what you're thinking. That's a lie because I tried to kill you before. " He chuckled, almost reading her mind. " But you see, you're just kind of a means to an end. So, I had to in order to get what I really want. "

Eye glanced at him for a moment in a questioning look, but then put her head back down in a submissive and docile look to hopefully get his attention away from her.

" You see, even now, I'm not here because of you. I'm here because this war with Yoshida... who is the main Yakuza boss here in Tokyo by the way, has really been crushing me. " He chuckled. " Though, it's not like I'm surprised. Between the police ramping up and Yoshida's massive resources, I kind of knew that my days are numbered. "

" Especially with the Shinomiya girl being freed. I honestly didn't anticipate that. I knew Yoshida would find some way to keep the police at bay, but it ultimately failed and now we're pretty much done for. " He chuckled. " I tell you; this war was really fun. I never intended to win mind you, and I knew I couldn't. Yoshida has way too many resources. "

" However, what I want is to fight in a true death match. You see, I grew up on the streets fighting. I got so good that eventually it just started to get boring. But then I found someone who really made me feel that thrill again. Do you want to know who? "

Ai stayed quiet, unsure of what to say. She tried to hold her babies close to her chest, hoping that her arms could provide a kind of shield for them.

" Come on, it's so rude to not answer a question. " He said, forcing her to speak.

"... Yes... " Ai replied in a low and terrified tone.

" It's polite for a young woman to look a man in the eye when she speaks. " He said.

Ai forced herself to look up at his face. She saw his grin, an evil grin that promised death and destruction. He looked thrilled and even excited about the situation. It terrified her.

" Yes. " She said, trying to sound confident but failing miserably.

" Eren Yeager. " He said, causing Ai to look at him with a surprise expression. *" Oh, he didn't tell you? "* He chuckled.

Tell her what? That this psycho saw her boyfriend and the way he fought on stage and suddenly developed a desire for revenge? Ai could piece that together herself. Her education was spotty, but she was intelligent.

" You see, Eren is a very unique fighter. I can tell from how he fights that he's been in real combat. Not these petty gang wars, but real war. The kind that involve hundreds of men charging to their death. Now, I don't know what country he fought for, but he's clearly an experienced warrior. "

" So, after the first time we fought- " First time? *" Eren really showed how adaptable and tenacious he was. While not necessarily the best at technique, he makes up for it in raw strength and determination. I can honestly say I have a lot of respect for the man. "*

" So, why are you here? " Ai asked, wondering where this was all going.

" Because you're my ticket to an unrestricted fight. Eren until now has always held back, I can tell. But if he sees your corpse, I'm sure that would completely take away any hesitation in his fighting. " He explained.

" W-what do you want with him? " Ai asked. *" Did you just decide to try and kill him on that stage after you tried to kill me? "*

Ai was terrified, but she couldn't help but ask these questions. Nothing the man said made sense. There's no way Eren met him before. The only time was the attack on the stage.

" Actually, I tried to kill you because of him. " He said with a grin on his face.

" What? " Ai asked, confused.

" You clearly don't know what he does for a living. " He said.

" H-he's a mover. " Ai said.

" A mover... really? What company does he work for? " He asked.

Ai was about to answer... but she couldn't. She had no idea what company Eren works for. He never said and she never asked because he was always so vague.

" Let me guess, he works with an older Russian man, right? " He asked.

" He helped Eren, because he escaped from the Syrian war. " Ai said.

" Really, that's what he told you? " The man chuckled.

" Yes, he helped Eren because Eren's Ukrainian. " Ai tried to defend Eren.

" That's a lie. " He chuckled. *" Eren isn't Ukrainian. "*

" I saw his passport. " Ai said.

" A passport that Yoshida gave him. " That Yakuza boss he mentioned? Why would Eren know him?

" You're lying. " Ai denied.

" Let me tell you the truth about your little boyfriend. Eren snuck into Japan over a month ago from some unknown country. He's here illegally and started a little business in crime. He even earned himself a nickname, a nice little name the media started calling him. Can you guess what it is? "

" The Akuma no Ko? " Saitou said out loud, piecing the information together.

That explains why Eren's passport number didn't register. It's fake.

" You're lying. " Ai said.

" Don't you think it's weird that a man who's illiterate magically comes from no where the same time the Akuma no Ko makes an appearance? " He asked. *" Whether you believe it or not, Eren is the western criminal that's been making rounds in Japan. Supplied by a very influential Russian arms dealer. Sound familiar? "*

Ai was frozen in shock. She couldn't believe that Eren, the man who would entertain a little girl or show Ai so much care, could possibly be a criminal. There was no way.

" And the thing is, he's put you in danger. I've ordered a hit on you so I can make him mad. And I've only been stopped because of him. But now, now you're defenseless. And when he gets here, he'll- "

Bang, Bang, Bang

Everyone turned towards the door, though the Yakuza guy had an excited look on his face.

" I'll be damned, I was expecting him to come by after we left to find a skinned corpse. But I guess using you as live bait works too. All of you, get out there and deal with him! " He chuckled.

A skinned corpse!? This monster was truly going to kill her. Ai quickly glanced at the other girls, and they had the same reaction. Why was

he going so far to get revenge on Eren? Was he that upset at not killing Ai before?

Come to think of it, how did he know Eren cared for Ai? She never told anyone about Eren that wasn't in her close circle.

" *Time to end this.* " He chuckled to himself.

A Few Minutes Earlier

Eren was dressed in his "Work uniform", which was just his black turtleneck sweater and his suit pants and dress shoes. He didn't have his glasses, hat, or jacket since it would be too easy to identify him if he did. His hair was also back in its bun.

Eren was carrying an iced latte that he got a block away from Ai's dance studio since he wanted to surprise her with it. He was really beginning to care for her and wanted to make her day better.

"Damn, idol got found out." Sergei said in the driver's seat.

"Found out?" Eren asked.

"Take a look." Sergei handed Eren his phone, briefly slowing down since he wasn't looking at the road.

Eren took the phone and tried to read it. He noticed a few familiar symbols and even Ai's name, but the rest he couldn't quite get. There was a picture of Ai, but the rest of it made no sense to him.

"Right, illiterate." Sergei chuckled to himself.

"I am literate Sergei." Eren said in an annoyed tone.

"Apparently, they found out Ai had a kid." He said.

"I remember Ai telling me how worried she was if it was ever discovered, what happens to her now?" He asked.

"Well, her career is ruined." Sergei said.

"Really?" Eren asked.

It always surprised him how your social standing could change over something as simple as having a child. He really couldn't think of an equivalent. He supposed some nobilities had instances where their social standing was destroyed if children were born out of wedlock or through affairs, but for the common people, no one cared.

He always considered Ai a common woman and not a noble, since she wasn't very wealthy. Eren guessed that it just had to do with what she said about how rabid fans can get.

"I guess we'll figure out what to do from here." Eren said.

"That's the spirit." Sergei laughed as he pat Eren on the back. "You'll figure something out."

"Especially once this war is over, I'll tell Yoshida that I'm done. I'll try to see if I can get work somewhere." Eren said in an unsure tone.

"Yoshida won't let you go kid." Sergei said.

"He'll be a damn fool if he thinks he can manipulate me through force." Eren said. "If Yoshida ever makes himself a threat to Ai, I won't hesitate to end his life."

"Honestly, considering how you handle yourself; I think I almost believe that." Sergei chuckled. "Be careful if you stand against him. He controls too mu-"

BANG! BANG! BANG!

Sergei had to swerve as they approached the studio due to a group of gunmen firing at the car. Eren had to get low as possible as the windshield shattered from the bullets as they impacted the car. He felt lucky that he wasn't hit.

"What the hell!" Eren yelled as he took out his engraved Marleyan pistol.

"Nakano!" Sergei yelled.

Here!? At Ai's work!?

"Where the hell are Yoshida's men!?" Eren yelled. "He's supposed to be protecting her!"

"We can debate later!" Sergei said as he took out a pistol as well. "For now, focus on killing!" Sergei said.

Eren opened the door and crawled out of the now bullet ridden car. The Yakuza members were using automatic gun which forced Eren to duck behind the engine block of the car to get the most cover. He could barely hear anything over the noise.

Eren laid on the ground behind the front tire and tried to get an angle at the gang members from under the car. He took aim and fired a few shots into their legs, causing them to fall over before being executed with following shots.

"They're in the second story window!" Sergei yelled out.

Eren looked up and tried to get under the car after noticing that they had an angle on him. He was stuck as bullets peppered the car around him.

"Sergei, we need to get into the building!" Eren yelled.

"Da, I know!" Sergei said. "Let me get something!"

Sergei crawled to the back of his car and opened the trunk, hoping to find anything useful. He rummaged around before pulling out a bag of grenades, it would be perfect.

"We can't throw grenades in there; Ai might be there!" Eren said.

"Smoke grenades, just run when I say so!" He said.

Eren had no idea what smoke grenades were but decided to listen to Sergei. Eren waited as Sergei pulled the pin and threw the grenade to the center of the road. Eren wondered if he should run now but wasn't sure why the grenade wasn't going off.

Suddenly, green smoke started to leak out of the grenade. For a moment, Eren thought it was broken, but realized this was the point. The smoke would conceal his movement so he could run into the building and lessen his chances of getting shot.

"Not yet!" Sergei yelled, waiting for the smoke to get thicker.

Eren took this time to remove a clip from his pocket and load it into the pistol from the top. He pocketed the empty clip for later before cocking the gun and putting a bullet in the chamber.

"Now!" Sergei yelled.

Eren crawled out from under the car and ran over to the building as fast as he could. He felt random bullets impact near him as the Yakuza fired blindly into the smoke, hoping to get lucky. Fortunately, Eren reached the door of the building before he was hit, allowing him to move with relative cover to find Ai.

Eren knew exactly what floor Ai should be, but he wasn't sure if she'll still be there. He hoped that she was ok, and he swore he'd kill Mao if he even lays a finger on her.

Eren ran up the stairs, easily killing any gang member he saw. He shot them and if he got close enough, he shattered an arm or leg before executing them with a single shot to the head. Ai and her children were in danger, and he was going to tear apart anyone who got in his way.

Eren reached the door that she was supposed to be in. He ran up to it and kicked it open, barely able to react as Mao dove at him from

his blind spot.

"You won't be needing this!" Mao said as he grabbed Eren's gun and threw it away.

The gun slid on the floor until it stopped in front of Ai and the rest of B-Komachi. Eren briefly stopped a moment, realizing something that he didn't consider in the heat of the moment while rushing to save Ai.

Ai and the group stared at the gun, and there was no mistaking it. It was the same kind of gun recovered from the concert, the signature calling card of the Akuma no Ko, the western devil of the Yakuza. The man who helped to plunge Tokyo into a gang war.

Ai stared at Eren after looking at the gun, her eyes wide with shock and fear at learning the truth.

"Oh, he really didn't tell you." Mao laughed as he got Eren in a rear choke while grappling on the ground. "This is good, yea, your boyfriend here is the Akuma no Ko, the man who can single handedly destroy an entire Yakuza safe house. With a reverse grip RPG no less." He laughed.

Eren elbowed Mao in the kidney, causing him to grunt in pain and allowed Eren to spin around and kick Mao off him. Eren quickly stood up and got into a fighting stance.

"Yea, he's a great fighter. He's going to punch and not let me fin-" Mao reacted and countered Eren's punch by throwing his own, hitting Eren right on the cheek.

Eren threw a few rapid punches and kicks, only for Mao to dodge and counter relatively quickly.

"You're getting way too predictable Eren." He laughed.

Mao took a small and familiar vial out of his pocket. Eren wouldn't get surprised a second time with that. He grabbed his arms and bent

it at a weird angle, forcing him to drop the vial of pepper or whatever it was.

Mao reacted by pushing Eren away, gaining some space so he can take a quick pause to consider his options.

Eren charged at Mao with a yell, ducking under a punch and moving around his body so he could grab him by the waist and Suplex him. Mao seemed to anticipate this and used his arms to brace the slam on the ground, reducing the effectiveness of the attack.

Eren tried to take the initiative and mount Mao, but Mao kicked Eren in the legs and used the force to push himself backwards and out of Eren's reach. Eren tried to press the attack, but Mao was able to stand up fast enough and delivered a powerful kick to Eren's shin.

Eren fell to the ground and was getting tired of this. He needed to end it fast before anyone got hurt.

Eren got up and sprinted to his gun on the floor, but Mao was able to react faster and kicked him in the side, causing Eren to fall over from the shock.

Mao started to beat Eren and kick him while he was down, right in front of his little audience. Mao would have preferred a group of hanging corpses for decoration, but this would be enough. Eren was angry enough at Ai being in danger, so it would do for now instead of a blood crazed and vengeful Eren.

Eren got to his knees through the onslaught and punched Mao right in the stomach, momentarily stopping the attack before following with an uppercut to the jaw. Mao stumbled back from the hit but quickly recovered.

Mao and Eren traded blows for the next few moments, blocking and dodging what they could as they started to bleed, and bruise from the repeated attacks. Eren was the stronger fighter, but Mao was more technically skilled, allowing him to hit Eren more times.

Eren threw a faint, causing Mao to overreach before Eren threw a different punch, hitting him square in the side of the head.

Mao fell to the ground, dazed, but struggling to get back up.

When he looked back at Eren, Eren had his pistol aimed right at him.

BANG, BANG, BANG, BANG!

Four shots hit Mao right in the stomach. Without any armor, he was going to die from the wounds.

Mao fell to his knees, one of the bullets must have grazed his spine, making him begin to feel numb from the waist down. He wasn't going to be able to move after that.

"Got me pretty good." He chuckled. "Guess the old man is going to be happy about this. His plan is almost done."

"I don't give a damn about Yoshida." Eren said.

"Yoshida, is that who you think I'm talking about?" Mao chuckled. "Sure, Yoshida's plan is going off without a problem." Mao started to openly laugh.

"I don't give a damn about any of it." Eren said, loading a new clip into the gun.

"Whatever you say Yeager." Mao said. "I will admit, that was fun. You're one hell of a fighter. I'm glad I failed to kill you in that ambush. And the warehouse, you have my respect."

Eren walked up to Mao and placed the pistol right against his head, intending to simply end this war and protect Ai.

"And sorry I couldn't kill her before she learned the truth about yo-"

BANG!

Mao fell to the ground, dead.

Eren took a second to collect himself. His face was bloodied again from the fight and he felt bruises forming on his limbs where he blocked Mao's attacks. Regardless of how he felt, Ai was now safe, at least from Mao.

However-

"Get away!" Saitou screamed as he stood up and blocked Eren from Ai.

Eren turned to the group, Saitou was standing between him and the girls. Saitou had a chair that he picked up and held it in front of him like an improvised weapon. He knew it was pointless since Eren had a gun, but he had to do something.

Eren stood there, unsure of what to do. He wanted to assure them that he wasn't going to do anything, but the fear on every single one of their eyes told him that they didn't want him near them.

Aqua was the only one who had an understanding that Eren wasn't from this world, so to him, it made sense that Eren may have been forced into organized crime to survive. Especially since he didn't fully know the capabilities of people in another world, Eren could be and do anything. Who knows, maybe in his world magic existed. However, he couldn't tell anyone that.

All the girls from B-Komachi looked at him with fear, with the exception of Meimei, who had a defiant and angry look at him. She interpreted that Eren was using Ai to either get close to something or as a cover. There is no way a criminal like him could actually develop feelings for someone.

All the girls felt like that. They always had suspicions of Eren, but now this made sense. They mentally kicked themselves at not trying to keep Ai away from him, since apparently it was his fault that the Yakuza came after her.

Ruby didn't know what to think. Even as a twelve-year-old, she was too young to fully understand what was going on. She knew Eren was a good person with how he treated her, but he was also a criminal. All of which who were supposed to be bad people. She felt so confused.

Ai though-

"Stay away!" She yelled at Eren.

"But Ai-"

"You're a criminal!?" She questioned.

Eren had nothing he could say. The look she gave him... it was fear. The same fear he always imagined if she learned the truth about what he does. The same fear that he remembered from the people of Marley when he attacked Liberio. The fear of standing in front of a devil.

"The news reported that you kidnapped Kaguya!" She accused.
"That the Akuma no Ko stole her and hurt her! So, what was that night we spent with her and her friends!? Was that you gloating!? Did you wear a mask when you took her!? Or did you threaten her not to say anything!?"

Ai began to cry as she yelled, the tears streaming down her face. The man she grew so close to, the man she felt herself falling for, was the worst criminal in recent Japanese history. The man who killed an entire warehouse of people on his own with military guns and explosives. The man who turned Tokyo into a warzone.

"I didn't-" Eren tried to walk towards her.

"Stay back!" Saitou yelled, not letting Eren past him and near Ai.

"I didn't mean for this to happen." Eren said.

"He said he tried to kill Ai because of you!" Meimei yelled. "Is that it!? She's a target and nearly died because you're a criminal!? Aqua nearly died on stage because of you!"

Eren couldn't deny that. Arguably, Ai would be much safer if he never showed up. She was in danger from anyone who wanted to get at him. Even with Mao gone, it was possible that other Nakano-Kai members will try to get her.

"Damn, you did some work." Sergei chuckled as he entered the dance studio. "Sorry, bad time?" He asked.

Eren was silent, unable to say anything to defend himself. To be honest, Eren didn't feel like he could. Sergei told him from the beginning not to be reckless, and he ignored him. It nearly cost Ai her life. All because he was reckless and got too deep.

If he did what Sergei said from the beginning, none of this would have happened. Eren chose his own standard of living over doing the right thing, and because of that, Ai hated him.

And why shouldn't she? Even in this world, Eren was still a devil. He extorted an innocent man out of his money because Yoshida ordered him to. He continued killing people even though he had no enemies in this world.

"I'm sorry Ai." Eren said as he looked down.

"We should go, the police are here, and my car is full of bullet holes." Sergei said.

Eren nodded and turned away, leaving Ai and the rest of B-Komachi alone to be discovered by the police.

After running out of the building and into a back alley, Eren and Sergei ran to a nearby safe house that was about ten blocks away. Once there, Eren stopped and stood still to try and compose himself.

Eren's life here was over. Not only was he alone again, but now the police would know who he is. He would be hunted down like a rat in the walls, and then he'd probably be executed. He wondered if Japan used hanging or some form of slow torture to execute prisoners.

Hanging was the most common form of execution in the walls, but some crimes got you a torturous execution, such as being burned alive or gibbeting. Eren wondered which ones they used here.

"Are you ok?" Sergei asked.

"No, no I am not." Eren said honestly, recognizing the pain he felt.

"Guess you lost the girl." Sergei said.

"No shit." Eren said, though he had no emotion to it.

Sergei was quiet, not sure what to say exactly. He understood Eren's situation and knew that his life here was basically over. The Akuma no Ko was one of the most wanted men in Japan, and since Japan was so close to western nations, Eren would be wanted globally in most first world nations.

Not to mention, he lost the woman that he clearly loved.

"What will you do now?" Sergei asked. "Mao is dead, and that basically means Yoshida won. So where do you go from here?"

"I'll continue working with Yoshida until the remnants of the Nakano-Kai are dealt with." Eren said.

"Really?" Sergei asked.

"Just in case anyone still has orders to kill Ai." Eren reasoned. "Once I'm sure they won't retaliate against her, I'm telling Yoshida that I'm leaving for good."

"You know he won't let you go." Sergei said.

"I don't give a damn anymore." Eren said. "Ai is gone to me, so she'll be useless to him now."

"Really? Because to Yoshida, it doesn't matter how Ai feels about you. Only how you feel about her." Sergei reasoned.

"If Yoshida tries anything against her, he's a dead man." Eren said. "I can't stay here any longer."

"What do you mean by here?" Sergei asked.

"After I make sure that Ai will be safe, I'm leaving Japan for good." Eren said.

"Where will you go?" Sergei asked.

"I don't know." Eren shrugged. "I guess wherever. Maybe I'll find a mountain to climb."

"Well, if you need to be smuggled out of the country, you just let me know." Sergei said. "I have a feeling that you're going to be the most wanted man in Japan after today."

"Yea, I guess I will be." Eren said sadly.

Eren felt paralyzed, unable to think or do anything right now. He felt disgusted at himself for letting it go this far.

"I'm sorry Sergei." Eren said.

"What?" Sergei asked.

"I should have listened to you from the beginning. About not getting too involved. But I didn't listen." Eren said. "Now, now Ai is lost to me. My one chance to do something more than killing in this world is gone."

"Well, there are a bunch of countries out there." Sergei said with a shrug. "You could always go to Ukraine, actually make that lie

honest." He tried to joke, but Eren didn't laugh.

"I'll figure it out after I deal with the Nakano-Kai and talk with Yoshida. Until then, I'll just keep moving forward."

Sergei watched as Eren went to one of the rooms in the safe house to get some sleep. Clearly, he was really sad about what happened. His girlfriend may be safe, but Eren was clearly affected by the whole event.

Sergei wondered if maybe he should have a conversation with the young single mother, maybe to put things into perspective. Now, how to go about doing that?

Ai was outside the dance studio in a state of shock. Saitou was busy explaining everything that happened to the police.

The police asked most of the idol's questions about Eren Yeager, such as how they knew him and what their relationship to him was. Ai couldn't speak so the girls requested to speak on her behalf. It was quickly ruled that the girls didn't know Eren's identity and weren't collaborating with him as the Akuma no Ko.

Ai sat down in the back of the ambulance, holding Aqua and Ruby on her knees as she kept her cheek buried on the top of their heads. She was so confused on what happened today and so scared for the safety of her children.

There were two parts of her yelling at the other. One side refused to believe that Eren was a murdered and a criminal. She couldn't imagine the kind and gentle man who let Ruby style his hair as a criminal. It didn't make sense.

But another side said how it was obvious from when he killed Ryosuke. The signs were there, but Ai just ignored them. She let a confirmed murdered and Yakuza criminal near her children and was even falling in love with him.

But the thing was, she still had feelings for him. She almost felt like she would run away with him even if he was the most wanted man in Japan. How could she fall for a man like him?

She was just so confused and didn't know what to think. Since this morning, her career ended, she nearly died again, and the man she was falling for ended up being a member of organized crime.

" The police are saying they can't take you into protected custody right now due to the gang violence. " Saitou said. *" We need to get you and the kids somewhere safe. "*

" We should go see if Kaguya can help us. " Ai said with little emotion.

" Kaguya? " Saitou asked.

That's right, she never told him that they met.

" Shinomiya Kaguya, she's a friend that I met from a few weeks ago. "
" Ai said. " THE Shinomiya Kaguya. She can protect us. "

" I won't even ask how you met her. " Saitou said. *" But it doesn't matter. If you can get to safety, do it. "* He said.

Ai had to balance Ruby in her lap as she reached for her phone to ask for Kaguya's help. She didn't want to intrude, but right now survival took precedence.

So, I'm very happy with how the reveal turned out, but not so thrilled on how I finished Mao lol. Honestly, I felt like I needed to add more stuff with him, but he was always seen as basically a mid-level boss for the story, so the actual climactic fight will be later. Plus, good learning experience lol.

Although there is the trope of the reveal happening and the couple splitting for a bit, it is necessary in this case because let's be real, Ai

would react negatively to discovering that her boyfriend is a criminal. Especially a member of organized crime.

Now with her career ruined, her boyfriend gone, and isolated from the world again, she'll need to overcome this chapter in her life. We'll see if she can.

Hope you guys enjoy.

Ai is Depressed

Chapter 41: Ai is Depressed

"Good evening members of B-Komachi, welcome to my mansion." Kaguya bowed to Ai and the rest of B-Komachi, along with a few members of her staff.

"Amazing..." Ruby said in amazement as she looked around the massive palace sized house.

"I'll never get used to this." Aqua said to himself as he looked around in amazement.

"Thank you Shinomiya-San." Saitou bowed to Kaguya.

"Please, just call me Kaguya." Kaguya said. "There is no need for formalities while you all are here as my guests."

"We really can't thank you enough." Meimei said. "We do apologize for the intrusion though."

"Nonsense." Kaguya waved off. "I know better than most how it feels to be attacked by Yakuza." She said.

"I'm terribly sorry for not realizing sooner." Ai said sadly.

"Realizing what?" Kaguya asked.

"About Eren, I had no idea." Ai said.

"W-well, I guess it can't be helped." Kaguya said in an unsure voice.

Kaguya wondered if she should reveal the truth to Ai, especially considering that Eren wasn't entirely bad. However, if she let slip

about anything, it could reveal to the staff, and more accurately her father, that the Nakano-Kai was not the ones who kidnapped her.

Already, the Nakano-Kai were either being killed by the Akuma no Ko, that being Eren, or captured and detained with rigged trials on the way. Her father was extremely mad about her kidnapping and was intent to punish those he saw as responsible.

However, since they were still a threat, Kaguya didn't want to even mention Eren until they were dealt with. That way, Ai and her family would be safe. She would resolve to only tell her and the rest of B-Komachi when ready, but not until she was away from staff.

"I'm sorry I invited him. I hope you weren't aware. If you were scared, please forgive me." She bowed.

"I said it's alright, so please, don't worry." Ai smiled. "Until then, please let my servants take you to your guest bedrooms and take your luggage. Dinner will be soon, and I'll make sure our personal chef prepares the best meal possible."

"Thank you again, we'll find a way to pay you back." Saitou said.

"Again, think nothing of it. Consider it payment for Ai-San's hospitality after my escape." She waved off the thanks again.

"Please, this way my lady." Hayasaka went up to Ai and did a curtsey.

"Hayasaka, it is good to see you again." Ai attempted a fake smile.

"You as well, please allow me to take your suitcase." She said as she easily lifted the small suitcase.

Ai followed Hayasaka up to the second floor, where her guest room was. All the members of B-Komachi got a room to themselves in the east wing second floor guest hall, only Miyako and Saitou shared a room since they were married.

Ai held Aqua and Ruby in her arms, terrified of being parted with her babies for even a second. She felt like, at any time, either a vengeful fan or even Eren would attack her.

Eren attack her? Why does that thought feel so impossible? Eren was always so nice and kind. He was sad and even a bit brooding, but he'd never do anything to hurt her or her children. If anything, he protected her.

But that was all a lie. She didn't know why he tried to form a relationship with her. Maybe she was a cover he used if ever questioned by the police. Maybe he was just getting a sick thrill in toying with her emotions?

But that didn't feel right either. Ai was the one who pursued him. He tried to push her away on several occasions. Ai was also confident that she could detect his lies. She always did before, but she never called him out on it since she understood that sometimes, people don't want to be honest about some things.

In this case, the thing was that he was a career criminal and one of the worst in Japan's recent history. Where does he get all those guns from the news anyway? Was it Sergei, that Russian guy?

What was the story there? Did Sergei compel Eren to commit crimes or did Eren seek out Sergei? What was the real story?

"Mama, are you ok?" Ruby asked.

"Yes Ruby-Chan." Ai said with little emotion.

Ruby was getting upset at her mother's over all lack of emotion recently. She understood Ai was having a rough time and knew it would be selfish to expect her to be happy, but she wished to see her mother's smile again.

Aqua noticed she was very sad and tried her best to hide it. She was almost emotionless right now and seemed to be operating on

autopilot. A far cry from how Ai normally was.

"Thank you Hayasaka." Ai said.

"If you need anything, please don't hesitate to ask." She said before closing the door to the room.

After reaching the room, Ai placed the twins on the bed near the luggage that was delivered. She sat down on the bed and took out her cellphone to check social media. Ai knew this was a terrible idea, but she had to know what was going on.

Ai is such a freaking liar!

Do you think that kid belongs to the Akuma no Ko? Was Ai involved in crime?

Ai falling in love with a criminal? What a shallow whore! She might as well work at the red-light district!

Having a kid with a Yakuza member!? She should be arrested!

I'm burning all my Ai merchandise! What a whore!

Apparently, Ai was passed around in the Yakuza. B-Komachi sells their idols bodies to politicians and criminals.

Ai had to fight the instinct to cry. The rumors and gossip were bad. Between learning that Ai was dating Eren and that she had a son, social media exploded with theories and conspiracies of all kind. Her reputation was even worse than if she was just a single mom.

Some details of Hikaru attacking Aqua was left out of the report, so no one knew she had a daughter or who Aqua's father was. So, they all assumed it was Eren.

Ai was sad that she could barely find anyone who defended her. She shouldn't be surprised; she saw similar things to idols who either had children or got a boyfriend. Still, after her whole career and the love

she gave to her fans, she hoped that maybe they would accept her anyway.

They didn't, and Ai learned in this moment that their love truly was fake.

"Mama, can I have the phone?" Aqua asked.

Aqua saw her looking at her fans reactions, which was causing her a lot of stress. He wanted to take it away from her and keep her mind off of it until she had time to process.

"Mama?" Aqua tried again.

She was hyper fixated on the phone.

The Akuma No Ko is Named Eren Yeager!

A headline read, taking the police report off of B-Komachi's testimony.

The Akuma no Ko, the criminal who has been plaguing the Tokyo streets for the past few months has been identified as an illegal immigrant by the name of Eren Yeager. While at first, he claimed to be a Ukrainian national who was seeking asylum, testimony from the controversial idol group B-Komachi, reveals that he lied about his origin.

At this time, the police have not issued a statement on why Eren was associated with the idol group, however fan speculation points at the possibility that B-Komachi and Strawberry Productions has been selling their idols off to influential figures. The police however, have investigated the idol group and confirmed that this is not the case.

Additional speculation is that Eren Yeager threatened the idol group or used them as a cover so that he could blend in with the populace. The police raided his apartment, but it seemed he took whatever he had and fled before the police arrived. The various tools and parts in

his apartment lead investigators to believe that he may be construction an improvised bomb.

So far, Eren Yeager has been listed as the most wanted man in Tokyo and a massive manhunt has been issued for his capture and arrest. We can only hope that he is captured and prosecuted under the full extent of the law.

Eren was going to get what was coming to him it seemed.

Ai placed the phone down and took off her shoes. She laid down on the bed and pulled the covers over her body.

"Mama, I'm hungry." Ruby said as she held her stomach.

Ai didn't answer, having no energy to do anything right now. She wished her children would leave for a moment so she can have time to herself to cry.

"Come on Ruby, let's go try some of the chef's cooking. We get professional food." Aqua said, realizing that Ai needs time to process.

"But I want mama's cooking." Ruby argued.

"Ruby, please." Aqua pleaded. "Let's just go eat."

Ruby finally relented and followed him out the door. Before he left, Aqua could vaguely hear Ai begin to sob.

One Week Later

Eren got out of Sergei's car as he walked up to one of Yoshida's favorite restaurants. Although he was fighting a war, he still wanted to stay somewhat hidden from the police since there was no guarantee that they wouldn't arrest him.

Eren dressed in a pair of jeans and a hoodie, with the hood put up to conceal his identity. Sergei had to take roads with minimal cameras and Eren had to move around during the busiest parts of the day. Sneaking wasn't easy in this world, but he was getting used to it.

The old man was sitting in a private booth that was covered by a large red curtain, a guard sitting on the inside but off to the side, ready to defend Yoshida from any threats. Eren walked into the room and saw a large table with a grill full of cooking meat.

"Eren, good to see you." Yoshida said. "A terrible thing about Ai, but the bright side is that this war is almost over."

"Really?" Eren asked.

"Come boy, sit down, get some food after a hard fight." He said.

Eren in the past week had been raiding safe houses and executing lieutenants in the Nakano-Kai, functionally ending their presence in Tokyo. It was a quick war since they had little to no funding and couldn't even hope to defeat Yoshida and the Shinomiya conglomerate combined.

It seemed like to Eren that the Nakano-Kai would fade into obscurity, their success eclipsed by the western devil that arrived out of nowhere.

"Are you hungry, I have some rice and meat already cooked." He handed Eren a bowl of rice and meat.

"I'll be fine." Eren said as he sat down, not in the mood to eat.

"Anyway, you've done a good thing for me. I think your role in this fight is just about over." He said. "I have a few more jobs for you, but after that, take a vacation. My treat. Take a trip anywhere you want around the world. Ever wanted to visit the Vatican?"

Eren had no idea what that was.

"I'll be fine." Eren declined.

"Ah, a man too busy with his work?" Yoshida chuckled. "Don't worry then, I can have a few simple jobs lined up. It'll be simple for you and a nice little break."

"That's the thing Yoshida." Eren began. "I'm done."

"Done, huh?" Yoshida asked, almost expecting this.

"The Nakano-Kai are no longer a threat, and I don't much care for continuing this line of work." Eren said. "I'm leaving the country and finding someplace else to go."

"Is that right?" Yoshida asked, taking a sip of some sake.

"I appreciate the help you gave me, but I have nothing left here and I intend to take my leave." Eren said. "I hope you understand."

It was a subtle challenge, Eren made sure Yoshida understood that Eren was done and had no intention of continuing. Eren's phrasing promised that there would be no trouble if he simply let Eren leave.

"You know, there was a few issues we ran into when the Shinomiya girl escaped. The police started a manhunt of revenge on every gang until she said it was the Nakano-Kai that took her." Yoshida said.

"This is relevant how?" Eren asked.

"No reason, just that I'll need to replace some of my forces since many of them got caught in the initial few hours that she was home. So, I'll be a little under strengthened for a while." Yoshida said, though Eren could tell where this was going.

"How long?" Eren asked.

"That's a great question, I can't say until I begin." Yoshida said.

"Don't patronize me Yoshida." Eren said. "I'm not going to be suckered into an indefinite contract because you want to lie and say you're down in men, when we both know that's not the case."

"Oh, you know?" Yoshida asked.

"I told you; I'm finished. I'll handle a few more jobs while I'm leaving but that's the extent of it. This was always meant to be temporary."

"There's nothing here that you wish to keep?" He asked, referring to Ai.

"Don't do that Yoshida." Eren said. "Don't use her against me. What was between us is now gone and I have no reason to stay in this country. You'll be wasting a lot of resources over something pointless if you target her."

"And you intend to walk away and do what exactly?" Yoshida asked, his anger rising. "You can't travel to any first world nation; they'll all hunt you down since your face and name is on international news. Any first world country will capture you and send you right back here for a trial. You might even get an international trial if you commit crimes elsewhere."

"That's my battle to fight Yoshida, not yours." Eren said.

"Anyone else, I'd have a finger removed for the insolence you're giving me brat." Yoshida threatened.

"Insolence?" Eren asked.

"You don't just choose to leave, not without my say so. And I'm telling you now, you're much too valuable of a soldier for me to lose." Yoshida said. "A man that can single handedly destroy a warehouse of armed thugs is not something you let any other organization have."

"I don't give a damn." Eren said. "I served you faithfully these past few weeks, won this war for you, and did everything you asked. I will not let myself become a pawn to someone else."

"And leave Ai all by herself?" Yoshida asked.

"Yoshida... don't." Eren said.

"Without my protection, you never know what could happen to her." He smirked, deciding to finally play that card.

"Yoshida, I am begging you, don't try it." Eren said.

"Begging?" Yoshida asked. "You're begging me?"

"Yes, begging." Eren said. "Since I got here, I have done nothing but make enemies. Now, I have no enemies. Mao is dead, the Nakano-Kai are functionally gone, and the world is open for me to explore. I am free, free from anything else since I got here. I am no longer desperate and am familiar with how the world works."

"So, you have no enemies and you're free?" Yoshida asked.

"Yes Yoshida." Eren said. "So, if you become my enemy, either by threatening Ai or trying to take that freedom from me, I won't ever stop. I have never once stopped pursuing what I want. If there are enemies in the way, they will all die. So, I'm begging you, don't be my enemy. I don't want to fight anymore."

Eren was tired of fighting. Tired of living life on the edge of victory or death. The nice and gentle home he had for the short time he spent with Ai made him want something more out of life. And he swore he'd have it.

"So, I'm begging you not to be my enemy, or I won't stop until I kill you." Eren glared at him, making it very obvious that if Yoshida made a move against Ai, Eren would kill him.

There was a chill Yoshida felt go down his spine due to his conviction, but Eren wasn't much of a threat to him. A good fighter, but he was one man against the entirety of one of the largest organized crime groups in Japan. He could never hope to defeat Yoshida.

"Then go, be free and live a life without enemies." Yoshida said as he held a cup full of sake up in a toast. "I'll be here when you desperately come back when you find yourself back in the criminal world."

Eren narrowed his eyes, understanding that Yoshida made a threat. Eren hoped he was going to let him go, but Eren wasn't naive. He knew that he may have to fight for his freedom again.

Eren certainly hoped that he wouldn't have to.

"Thank you, Yoshida." Eren said, deciding to accept the informal resignation, hoping that Yoshida was just speaking out of anger.

"I do hope to see you again one day Eren." Yoshida chuckled.

"Sorry, but I can't say the same." Eren said honestly.

After leaving the restaurant, Eren went outside and met back up with Sergei, who was smoking inside his car. He looked bored and was browsing his phone before Eren entered into the car.

"How'd it go?" Sergei asked.

"As well as I thought." Eren shrugged. "I think he may try something."

"Still want me to prepare the boat?" He asked, referring to the boat that he was going to use to smuggle Eren out of Japan.

"Yea, for now." Eren said. "Since it'll take a while to arrange, I'll keep an ear out in case Yoshida tries anything against Ai." Eren said.

"I will too, I have a few contacts that can keep an eye on her. Though with her taking refuge at the Shinomiya manor, I think it'll be impossible for anyone to do anything to her."

"She won't always be protected." Eren said. "And Yoshida won't kill her. Threaten her, maybe." Eren thought out loud. "But he needs her as a bargaining chip, so as long as she lives, he can use her later down the line."

"If you remain hidden and unable to be contacted, he may write her off." Sergei said.

"Possibly, either way, if he does anything to her... he will die." Eren said with conviction.

"I'll keep an eye on her and if anything happens, I'll find you." Sergei said.

"Thank you, Sergei." Eren said.

"I know a lot of people who owe me favors in a lot of countries. The Middle East, Africa, South America, Eastern Europe etc. Not so much Western Europe or North America, but if you need support, they can help you."

"Thank you, Sergei." Eren said.

"I just still think you should talk to single mom one more time." Sergei said.

"She wants nothing to do with me." Eren said. "You saw her face; she saw me as the Devil of Paradis... I can't face her again after that."

"One of these days, you have to tell me the origin of that nickname." Sergei said.

"I'd rather the truth die with me." Eren said.

"Whatever you want." Sergei said. "How about I talk to her." Sergei suggested.

"To be honest Sergei, I trust you alone with her about as much as I trust Yoshida." Eren said.

"Ouch!" Sergei exclaimed with a bellowing laugh. "Well, I can't blame you. I'd say the same about me if I was in your position." He chuckled.

"Please Sergei, just stay away from her." Eren asked. "I don't want her to be around anything related to criminals."

"I promise I will stay away from her." Sergei lied.

"Thank you." Eren said.

Sorry kid, Sergei thought to himself. He was going to have a conversation with Ai before Eren left. It was annoying enough having to lie to Eren that his smuggling was getting delayed since Ai locked herself in the Shinomiya mansion, making it impossible for Sergei to speak with her.

But eventually, Ai will come out and Sergei can have a good long talk with her about Eren. Hopefully soon before Eren realizes that the smuggling delays are all lies.

Aqua was now starting to get really worried about Ai. She stayed in her room nearly the entire time, barely doing anything at all. She ate maybe once a day, and she didn't style her hair or wear anything other than her pajama's. He knew that she needed time to grieve, but he was worried that she was becoming far too depressed.

She didn't even leave the room to celebrate her twentieth birthday, which added to the worry he felt.

"I'm worried Aqua." Ruby said.

"I am too." Aqua said.

"Do you think we should try to do something to cheer her up?" Ruby asked. "She hasn't even hugged us once since we got here."

"She's sad Ruby." Aqua said. "She's completely depressed after having not only her career ended, but her reputation tarnished, and people are calling her a Yakuza whore. To top it all off, the guy she liked betrayed her."

"B-but, Eren's a good person... right?" Ruby asked.

"I-I don't know." He said honestly.

Aqua knew of Eren's circumstances, that he was from another universe. Aqua wondered if Eren was desperate since he knew that Eren would be unable to even get a job with the fact that he was basically an illegal immigrant. He didn't even have a home country to get deported to.

So Aqua didn't want to judge a desperate man for doing what he needed to in order to survive. He saw many patients in the hospital that did dangerous things out of desperation. That said, his ease of killing people and the destruction he caused did make him worry if Eren wasn't entirely as good as he claimed he was.

Aqua also knew that Ai pursued Eren, so Eren never manipulated her. If anything, he tried to get away from her, but Ai kept pushing. Aqua knew that Eren falling for Ai was genuine and he tried to push her away at first for her protection. So, it showed he was at least decent.

For now, Aqua would reserve judgement.

"Let's try and talk to her. We need to get her at least moving." Aqua said.

"Yea, once she sees my smiling face, she should be better." Ruby naively hoped.

Aqua and Ruby opened the door to their room. Ai was on the opposite edge of the bed, her hands on the cushions and her head down. Her hair was a mess, and she wore her pajama pants and a t-shirt.

"Mama..." Ruby said timidly.

Ruby walked up to Ai around the bed, hoping that she could do something to cheer her mother up. Ruby couldn't see her face, but she knew her mother probably finished crying.

It truly broke her heart to see Ai in this state. The amazing girl who sang and danced for her every single night in the hospital, the woman who cared and loved her when she was reborn, seemed so different now.

Next to Ai was a small pink stick. Ruby got a look at it to see what it was.

Ruby widened her eyes. She knew what that was. Aqua saw it as well and had a similar reaction to her.

It was a pregnancy stick, and according to the result... Ai was pregnant.

She must have just found out. Aqua could tell that Ai was in an almost catatonic state right now, as if the result of the test still hasn't fully registered yet. After everything that happened last week, for this to be thrown on her, must have been terrible.

"Ruby, we need to go." Aqua said, realizing that Ai was in a very emotional state right now.

"No!" Ruby yelled out as she ran around and over to Ai.

Ruby hugged her mother's leg, but Ai didn't even react to her being there. She just sat in the same position as Ruby hugged her.

"Mama, please don't be sad." Ruby desperately tried to say. "I miss you mama! I miss your smile and I miss your hugs and kisses. Please mama, please can you say something?" Ruby begged.

Ai was still motionless, her face concealed by her hair. She still didn't even register Ruby.

"What about a hug mama?" Ruby asked. "Hugging me always made you feel better, right? Well, I'm right here. We can go do something. Anything. What about teaching me to dance, or more English lessons. We can do anything. Maybe the cook will let you borrow the kitchen to make me some food like you always do."

Ruby was trying so desperately to cheer Ai up. She wanted so much for the kind and gentle mother to show her love again. She just wished Ai would say something. Even if it was to cry, Ruby would prefer to cry with her mother than to be ignored.

"Is it about the pregnancy?" That got a reaction out of Ai as she almost jumped, as if finally realizing she wasn't alone in the room. "It's ok mama, we can raise whoever it is together. We can show him or her all the same love you gave us too. I might get a bit jealous if I don't get all your attention, but I promise to be a good older sister. Isn't it a good thing we're adding to the fam-"

"SHUT UP RUBY!" Ai screamed at Ruby, finally facing her daughter.

Ruby fell back in shock, never before hearing her mother get so loud. The look on her mother's face was... unknown to her.

She never saw that face before. Her red eyes were narrowed in anger, but her lips and teeth were bared in a sorrowful expression. Her hair covered her face and was wet where her hair touched her eyes.

She seemed angry, desperate, and terrified all in one.

"M-mama..." Ruby said in a broken and cracked voice as she started to tear up.

Suddenly, Ai's anger melted away as she saw her daughter start to cry.

"R-ruby-Chan..." Ai said, realizing what she just did.

"I'm sorry you hate me!" Ruby screamed as she stood up and ran towards the door.

"Ruby!" Ai called out, but Ruby was out the door by the time she stood up. "Please... I-I didn't..."

Ai stood there, again in shock. She didn't even realize what happened. She just got so angry when someone mentioned that she was pregnant from another absentee father and snapped. She didn't even realize she yelled at Ruby.

Ai turned her head and looked to see her mother looking at her. No, not her mother, her reflection in the mirror.

Ai always knew she looked similar to her mother. She had the same hair, same eyes, and even the same face. Her nose was different from her mother's, but without a father to compare, she didn't know why it was different.

However, Ai saw an exact carbon copy of her mother in the mirror. That same depressed look, that same messy hair, and those same red and puffy eyes. The only difference was the expression in the mirror. Her mother's expression was always angry and full of hatred, the reflections face was shock and sorrow.

"W-what have I..." Ai collapsed to her hands and knees and started to sob, not caring that Aqua was still in the room.

She was the exact same as her mother. No different at all. She tried so hard to be nothing like her, tried so hard to be a better person and a better mother. But she really was no different.

Ai made Ruby cry before, but those were more tantrums when she didn't let Ruby get her way sometimes. She always knew that was normal, but this was a different kind of cry. Ruby believed that Ai hated her, which was so far from the truth. Ai didn't know why she snapped at her, she just did.

"I Sob- Am a terrible mother..." Ai cried as she felt the tears run unchecked down her cheek.

Suddenly, Ai felt a tiny hand on her shoulder. She turned her head to look at her son's neutral and even... understanding expression. He looked so much older than she would believe.

"You're not a terrible mother mama." Aqua said in a gentle yet mature voice.

"What?" Ai asked.

"You've been through a lot." He said. "You had a lot happen to you over the past week and it wasn't fair. Ruby and I understood you needed time, and even though Ruby is emotional right now, I know she doesn't really believe you hate her."

"B-but... I yelled at her. I yelled at my baby girl." Ai looked away, ashamed that she was being so emotional in front of her son.

"It's ok mama." Aqua said. "You're allowed to get upset sometimes. You're allowed to feel and be human. Ruby and I understand."

"No, she doesn't understand." She cried. "She doesn't understand how it feels, to have your own mother hate and despise you. To have her abuse you, no matter what you did. I never want her to understand. I never want her to feel that way. Either of you. I never want either of you to feel that cold and lonely life."

Ai got to her knees and hugged her baby boy, being careful not to hurt his arm or his other injuries. She cried and sobbed as she held Aqua, so terrified that either of them could possibly imagine that she had anything else but love in her heart for them.

"Come on mama..." Aqua said, his voice cracking a bit. "You're going to make me cry."

"Stop being a mature boy for five minutes." She said through her sobbing.

Aqua struggled to hold back his own tears. It was such an emotional moment that he was struggling to maintain his composure. He let one or two tears slip through, but forced himself to remain calm.

After a few minutes crying, Ai calmed down enough to let Aqua go. She resolved herself to find Ruby and make amends, to make sure there was no doubt in her daughter's head that she was loved.

Ai scooped Aqua up and slowly jogged out the door, making sure that Aqua wasn't bounced so he wasn't hurt.

Ruby was easy to find, she was curled up in the hallway, her face buried in her knees and her body shaking from the sobs.

Ai felt her heart stop at the image. If it wasn't for her blonde hair, Ai would have felt like she was seeing herself. How many times did she do that exact thing, find a corner to curl up and cry when her mother hurt her. How could she let this happen?

"Ruby-Chan..." She said slowly.

"Mama?" Ruby looked up, seeing her mother jog up.

Ai knelt down and placed Aqua onto the ground before scooting over to Ruby. She wanted to hug Ruby, but she didn't know how.

"I'm sorry mama." Ruby said. "I-if I was better at cheering people up, maybe-"

To hell with knowing what to do. Her daughter needed a hug.

Ai hugged Ruby, almost crushing her. Since Ruby had no injuries, Ai could hug her and tightly as she wanted to. She kissed the top of Ruby's head and buried her cheek in her hair.

That feeling, the feeling of telling yourself that if you were better, you'd earn your mother's love. It was a feeling that was so persistent in Ai's life, a mantra she said to herself all the time growing up.

If only she smiled more, then her mother would love her.

If only she was talented, then her mother would love her.

If only she was smarter, she could find a way to make her mother love her.

Why was Ruby doing everything she did as a child? How terrible of a mother could she be.

"I'm sorry Ruby-Chan." Ai said in a wavering voice. "I don't want you to be better to earn my love. You don't need to. I love you no matter what. You don't ever need to believe that you need to earn my love. You had it the day you were born."

"But, you were angry at me." Ruby said sadly.

"I could never be angry at you Ruby-Chan... not like that." Ai said. "I have no excuses. I'm a terrible mother and you deserve better. I have no doubt that if Miyako-San took you two in, you would be much better off than with me. She's so much better than I am. You two deserve so much more."

"That's dumb mama." Aqua said. "Do you think Miyako-San is always perfect?"

"What?" Ai asked.

"Yea, she doesn't kiss us or play with us nearly as much." Ruby said, her sad and crying voice slowly fading away.

"She's... gotten better..." Aqua looked away, remembering how she was at first. "But she's not you mama. We don't need a perfect mama."

"Yea, who cares about having a perfect mama?" Ruby asked. "I want you as my mama, no one else." Ruby tightened her hug around Ai's waist.

Ai couldn't help but smile and even giggled. What little brats she had, trying to cheer her up like that.

"It's ok to be angry mama." Ruby said.

Ai released her hold of her daughter and had both her children stand in front of her. She stayed on her knees so that she could look both of them in the eye.

"I want you both to know something, and I'm telling you this because I don't ever want you to experience what I did." Ai said.

"What is it mama?" Ruby wiped her cheek, her tears mostly gone.

"I told you before that I grew up without a father. My mother was abusive and didn't love me. She hurt me, insulted me, and hated me. I always wondered why, but I think I understand now. I think that whoever my father was, left my mother. That he left her, and she became pregnant with me."

"I felt like her... so angry after what both Hikaru and Eren did. How two times now, I was left alone with children that would never have a father. I felt so angry. I wonder, if this is how my own mother felt. That she was angry and only had me to take it out on. I think that's why she hated me and hurt me."

"I was so scared this past week, that I would do the same to you. And I did, I yelled at you Ruby-Chan. I acted exactly how she acted. I didn't care about my appearance, and I didn't care for you two. I am exactly like her."

"No, you're not mama." Aqua said. "You may understand her, you may even pity her after going through the same thing, but you are nothing like her. She didn't do a fraction of what you did. It's ok to be upset and it's ok to have moments where you snap, but you are nothing like her. You're much better than her."

"Yea, she didn't know how amazing of a daughter she had." Ruby agreed. "And I knew you didn't hate me, I always knew."

Ai giggled at Ruby's little lie since she was trying to make her feel better.

Ai brought both of her children in another hug and pressed them into her chest, kissing the top of their heads. Her children truly were better than her, a thought that filled her with pride.

"I'll make sure to be a better mama from now on." Ai said as she broke the embrace.

"But you're fine mama." Ruby said.

"You said I'm not perfect, so I'll need to get better." Ai giggled. "I'll promise to be the same as before. And even better, now you two get to have the amazing idol Ai all to yourselves. I'll continue being an idol to my two biggest fans." She held up a peace sign.

Her career may be gone, but she still had two fans she needed to perform for.

"I love you mama." Ruby said, giving another hug.

"I love you Ruby-Chan, and you Aqua-Chan." Ai said.

"I love you too mama." Aqua replied.

"And don't worry, whoever your little brother or sister is, we'll give them the love they deserve." She said.

"Just promise to never yell at me again mama." Ruby said.

"I promise Ruby-Chan." Ai giggled at the promise.

"Even when I get in trouble." Ruby tried to push her luck.

"Nope, you'll still need to be punished if you're bad." Ai giggled at Ruby's pout.

Ai's development with her past trauma has finally come full circle.

She is human and does have a right to snap, especially after (From her perspective), she got pregnant to an absentee father all over again.

One thing I don't want to spoil, but will say because it is something people may be worried about... I am NOT going to have Eren leave for ten years and come back after a time skip. I know it seems that way, but that isn't happening lol. Might be a bit of spoilers, but yea, that's not happening.

It would piss me off and I know it would piss you guys off, so don't worry, Ai and Eren's relationship will be addressed and concluded this story.

Also, this chapter actually made me tear up a bit. Ai had a come to Jesus moment with her children and managed to at least get over some of the trauma she felt.

Anyway, hope you guys enjoyed. I certainly did and I can't wait to start the next chapter lol.

A Long Conversation

Chapter 42: A Long Conversation

After a long night of regaining the lost time she had with her kids over the past week, Ai seemed to be doing significantly better overall. She was taking care of her hair and skin again and making sure to dress nice, even if she was stuck indoors of the Shinomiya mansion.

Aqua was glad to see her acting the way she was before everything happened. She was eating again and was slowly regaining what little weight she lost after her week of depression.

He did notice that she retained her idol persona though, even though there was no reason for her to continue acting that way. He assumed that either she naturally did it for her children or it has become an inseparable part of her personality. After all, she spent eight years crafting and living by that persona.

Ruby was just happy that her mother was back to normal. She knew that Ai still was going through a difficult time, but she was so glad she was happy again. She understood now that Ai was not really mad at her and just had a moment where she got mad... what she meant was Ruby knew she wasn't mad all along! That's right.

She also swore to give her mother all the love she could to make her feel better. She also swore to be the best older sister possible so Ai can have it easy. Especially since it was going to be hard for Ai to raise three children on her own.

She was also worried if it would be a real baby and not someone who was reborn. That's a scary thought, since she knew that herself and Aqua were easy kids to raise since they were very self sufficient

and didn't cry much. If it was a normal baby, Ai would need all the help she could get.

As for Ai, she was able to at least focus on being a mother now. She was still sad and had moments where she would cry herself to sleep, but after last night, she realized that she had to be strong for her children. They deserved so much more than what she could provide, but she would at least give them the love they deserve.

So, she styled her hair in a straight and brushed style, put moisturizer on her face, and wore a cute outfit. It was a long sleeve, low cut black sweater with a white dress over it and a pair of black stockings for warmth. It felt very warm since she was very small and was never good at retaining heat.

She also cleaned the bedroom up a bit, making sure it was neat and tidy, making her feel so much better. She forgot how relaxing it was to stand back and feel the warmth of looking nice and being in a clean room.

Knock, knock

"Oh, that must be Hayasaka-San." Ai said as she jogged over to the door of the room.

"MAMA! STOP!" Ruby screamed.

"Wha-?" Ai stopped in her tracks and turned to her daughter.

The scream Ruby did was so unlike her. It wasn't her normal yell when she was excited or mad, this was a scream of pure fear. A scream that was brought about by something terrible that was happening.

"Ruby, what's wrong?" Aqua asked as he got off the bed.

Ruby sprinted over to Ai, her face soaking wet with tears as she crashed into Ai's legs in a hug, almost knocking her over. She

gripped Ai's dress so hard her knuckles turned white and she started to sob.

"PLEASE MAMA!" She screamed.

"Ruby-Chan..." Ai said slowly, unsure of what was going on or what she was doing.

"DON'T OPEN THE DOOR!" Her voice cracked as she screamed louder than Ai ever heard her.

"Is everything ok?" Hayasaka asked as she opened the bedroom door and tentatively stepped in.

"Ruby, please calm down." Ai said lovingly as she bent down and picked Ruby up in her arms.

Ruby wrapped her arms around her neck and sobbed as Ai bounced her, unsure of what was going on but focused on only calming and soothing her daughter.

"It's ok baby, mama's here." Ai said, fighting back her own tears at seeing her daughters fear, but she had to remain strong.

"Ruby, are you ok? What's the matter with you?" Aqua asked, scared that Ruby was scared. He didn't know why she was being like this.

"Mama..." Ruby cried as she calmed down.

"Ruby-Chan, please tell mama what's wrong." Ai said, rubbing her back gently.

"I-I don't k-know..." Ruby said through the tears.

"It's ok Ruby-Chan." Ai said. "You don't need to tell your mama right now, please just relax for me."

Ruby's crying started to slow down as she was slowly composing herself, relaxing as she kept her head buried in Ai's shoulder. Ai had

no idea why Ruby was screaming like this, it sounded like Ruby was being stabbed with how violent the episode was.

"Are you calm now baby?" Ai asked as Ruby leaned back so she could look at her.

"Yea..." She said quietly and in a tired voice.

It broke Ai's heart, Ruby was almost exhausted at the sudden burst of emotion. Like she just ran a marathon and was struggling to stay awake. What could have possibly caused this?

"Tell mama Ruby, tell mama what happened. Mama wants to help." Ai said.

"I-I-" Ruby could barely speak. "I saw blood mama."

"Blood?" Ai asked.

"All over you, you and Aqua. There was blood everywhere." She said though her tears.

"Ruby, look at me and Aqua." Ai said. "We're ok, see? No blood."

Ruby looked Ai up and down then over to her brother, confirming that there was no blood.

Ai didn't know what happened. It couldn't have been a dream since Ruby was awake and sitting on the bed. What compelled this behavior? Ai knew Ruby wasn't seeking attention like she usually does, this was a scream of pure fear and agony.

She really started to worry about both of her children's mental health. Having your life turned upside down and learning that the man you saw as a father was a criminal wasn't easy on the poor girl. Ai wondered if Ruby had a mental break down.

Ruby thought, she had no idea what happened. One moment her mother was jogging over to the door and the next she was behind a

glass door, covered in blood. She saw her blurred out figure, the white of her dress stained with blood and sitting against it. Ruby saw herself screaming but didn't know what she was saying.

"Are you sure she's ok?" Hayasaka asked. "We can take her to a doctor-"

"She's fine." Ai said as she held Ruby again. "She's just had a hard week." She said.

"I understand." Hayasaka said. "Lady Kaguya had her personal chefs prepare a meal for everyone, she's wishing that you would attend because she has something important she wants to discuss with everyone."

"We'll be there, thank you." Ai said.

She bounced Ruby in her arms a little bit more, making sure that she was ok before finally putting her down. Ruby wiped her tears away as she was now calm and able to talk better.

"There, no more tears." Ai smiled at her. "Don't worry Ruby-Chan, everything is fine. I promise."

Ruby nodded her head.

"Now come on you two, time for some delicious food." She grabbed both of their hands and started walking.

The family followed Hayasaka to the dining room, where the rest of B-Komachi and even Kaguya's friends were sitting. Everyone was dressed casually and smiled when they saw Ai.

"Hey Ai, glad to see you're out and about." Meimei smiled, hoping to keep Ai in good spirits.

"I'm sorry I wasn't around the past week." Ai smiled, glad that her friend was still trying to cheer her up.

"Yea, glad to see you're up, the kids have been bothering me non-stop." Miyako said, though Ai knew she was exaggerating since she loved the kids.

"It's good to see you again Ai!" Fujiwara yelled and waved.

"Likewise." Miyuki smiled and waved as well. "I'm sorry about what hap- Itai!" Kaguya kicked him in the shin under the table.

"It's ok Kaguya." Ai waved off, laughing at the interaction. "I am better now, I promise." She smiled.

"Aw, there's the big man!" Fujiwara stood up and rushed over to Ai.

"Not agai-" Aqua said in an annoyed tone as the girl scooped him up from Ai's side and hugged him, though gently.

"Poor little guy is all beat up, Oneesan will care for you."

Now she's his older sister, what happened to aunt?

"I know it's selfish to ask, but can he sit with me for dinner?" Fujiwara asked and gave the best puppy dog eyes she could.

Her little boy was such a little heart breaker, Ai couldn't help but laugh. And Aqua looked embarrassed, it was too cute not to let Fujiwara have him sit with her.

"Is it ok if you sit with Fujiwara-San Aqua?" Ai asked him in a sweet voice.

"Sure..." He said, knowing he'd regret this.

"Yay!" Fujiwara went back to her seat and sat the small boy in her lap, getting an extra plate prepared for when the food arrives.

"Mama, can I sit in your lap?" Ruby asked.

"Sure Ruby-Chan." Ai said, not able to refuse any of her daughter's requests after what happened earlier.

Ai really considered sending both of her children to therapy now, especially after Ruby's violent episode. Both of them experienced terrible things in the past month and she was worried about them adjusting to the changing situation. Especially Aqua, after she saw how much he seemed to have changed in terms of how he showed affection.

"How are you doing Ruby, anything fun happen?" Meimei asked Ruby.

"Yea, mama's pregnant!" Ruby unintentionally blurted out.

Meimei looked at Ai, as well as everyone else.

"Yes, I'm pregnant again." Ai sighed, hoping to bring that up later and in a less unexpected way.

"How?" Meimei asked.

"Yea, how?" Nino parroted.

"Well, you see girls, when a woman is ready, she fills an order to the stork-"

"What we mean is how, as in you and Eren did that?" Meimei asked, annoyed at Ai's sarcasm.

"I don't think there was any other men around." Ai said.

"You were all shy about it for so long, how many times did you two have sex?" Nino asked.

"The kids!" Ai yelled out.

"Sorry." Nino apologized. "But how many times?"

"... Once..." Ai said in a slightly ashamed voice.

"Once!?" The B-Komachi girls yelled.

"Didn't you only have one time with your ex as well!? Watanabe asked.

"... Yes." Ai said with a groan.

"Seriously Ai, you should think about starting a farm down there." Meimei said. "You are incredibly fertile."

Ai turned to Meimei and glared at her, not appreciating her joking about the situation.

"Sorry." She laughed.

"Wait, what does... S-Se-... physical relations have to do with her being pregnant?" Kaguya asked, unable to say the word without blushing.

"Eto... because they had sex." Miyako stared at Kaguya.

"And? I don't see how that's relevant." She said.

"Shinomiya..." Miyuki began. "That's how babies are made." He said. "Didn't Fujiwara tell you?"

"Don't bring me into this!" She said.

"I don't understand, she just said what it was. But isn't it the stork who delivers the child when a man and woman sleep together?"

Just a friendly reminder that Kaguya is the second smartest person in one of the most elite schools in the world.

"Lady Kaguya..." Hayasaka blushed out of secondhand embarrassment.

Kaguya may have learned what sex was that one time they discussed about high schoolers first time, but no one told her that's how babies are made. She always assumed sex was entirely recreational.

"What?" Kaguya asked. "I don't see how Ai's first time is the reason she's pregnant."

First time...? She has four-year-old twins, her first time was almost five years ago.

"I'll handle this, let the married woman explain it." Meimei said standing up.

"I'm married too." Miyako reminded.

Meimei whispered in Kaguya's ear, so the kids didn't hear the details. Slowly, Kaguya's face got redder and redder as she learned more and more about where babies come from. She stood up from the embarrassment.

"S-so... to have kids, I'd have to..." She said in complete shock and fear.

How was she supposed to have children!? She'd have to have sex!? She can barely even get past a single kiss.

The Kaicho tried recently to kiss her during a romantic dinner they had, their first official date... and Kaguya proceeded to kick him out of sheer embarrassment. Now in order to have a family they had to have sex? She was doomed!

"This girl..." Miyuki buried his face in his hands.

"You have yourself a true yamato nadeshiko." Meimei laughed, patting Miyuki on the back, which is a slang for an ideal Japanese woman.

"I was not expecting to have to explain this." Nino chuckled.

"Shinomiya isn't the most experienced of people." Ishigami said.
"She's lived a very sheltered life.

"Still, not the reaction I was expecting to my pregnancy." Ai giggled at the whole thing.

"I was expecting the President to get angry at you being pregnant again." Watanabe looked at Saitou, who shrugged.

"I'd be mad if my business wasn't ruined, but since Strawberry Productions is slowly getting destroyed and Ai's career is over, I don't care. Have as many as you want." He said.

"He means he'll be of any help he can." Miyako glared at him.

"What, she's a grown woman and it doesn't change anything. She doesn't have to worry about hiding a pregnancy anymore." He said.

"That's not the same attitude you had before." Miyako said.

"Well, everyone called me paranoid, and I'd hate to say this, but it turns out I was right to distrust Eren." He said. "Once again, Ai almost died and now we know he was responsible for some of those times."

"He didn't try to hurt me." Ai defended.

"No, but he got involved in crime and it got you involved to, so his actions nearly got you killed." He said.

"Ryosuke though wasn't Eren." Ai said.

"Are we sure about that?" Saitou asked.

"What do you mean?" Ai asked.

"Are we sure Eren didn't leak information so he could seem like a hero?" Saitou asked.

"That's an unfair assumption." Ai said.

"Is it, you almost died multiple times since you met him." Saitou said.
"If I could go back I'd lock you in your house the day of the twins birthday."

Saitou felt useless in protecting Ai. The woman he saw as a daughter almost died so many times. If he was just a little more strict, he could have saved her career and even her life.

"Papa released that information." Aqua said suddenly.

"What?" Ai asked.

"Papa... Hikaru, released that information. He bragged about it when he hurt me, said he was hoping mama would die from a crazed stalker."

Aqua had to defend Eren at least on that front. It was just a coincidence that Hikaru found Ai around the time Eren met Ai.

"He..." Ai had no words.

Hikaru tried to kill her? She assumed he got high with Aqua and tried to hurt him too much in a fit of rage... but he was going to kill her? He knowingly released information to a stalker so she would die?

"He said he wanted you dead mama."

"Why didn't you tell me Aqua-Chan." She asked.

"I was scared." He lied, preferring to have her believe that over keeping it a secret.

Had she done something wrong? Why did Hikaru want to kill her? What could have possibly happened that made him decide she needed to die? It couldn't be his career, he was a washed up actor.

Well, now she was a washed up idol because of him. How ironic.

"So, Eren did legitimately save her there." Nino said.

"Actually, that's what I wanted to talk about." Kaguya said, calming herself after her second huge revelation when it came to sex. "It's about Eren-San."

"What about him?" Meimei asked. "I mean, clearly there's nothing to discuss. He's a criminal who manipulated Ai to maintain his cover and avoid the police."

"Yea, he's a jerk." Kyun said. "He nearly got us killed since the Yakuza targeted Ai to get at him."

"And you've seen what he's done." Watanabe said.

"Yea." Nino said. "He's killed dozens of people and attacked Meimei's husband."

"Well, actually, that wasn't him." Meimei said.

"What?" Ai asked.

"Apparently, the Akuma no Ko helped him. It was the other Yakuza group that attacked." She said. "He said he'd be dead if it wasn't for Eren."

"It might have been a coincidence." Miyako said. "We don't know what he was doing."

"I think there's more to Eren than we've been led to believe." Kaguya said.

"Kaguya, he kidnapped you." Miyako said. "There is no more to it, he kidnapped you."

"I have to agree." Saitou said. "We don't know what he was planning, and he might have done the same to Ai."

"Yea Kaguya." Fujiwara said. "He was the one who took you, so why are you defending him?"

"But he saved mama." Ruby piped up.

"Yea, he did." Aqua agreed with his sister since he was the only one with the full context.

"Kids, you're too young to understand." Meimei said.

Kaguya knew she had to tell them, it was a bit of a gamble, but with the Nakano-Kai gone and Ai safe in her mansion, she knew they couldn't hurt her and as such, Yoshida won't target her either.

"I need to tell you all something, something important about my escape." She said.

"What do you mean?" Fujiwara asked.

"Eren didn't kidnap me, far from it." She said.

"Well, he kidnapped me." Miyuki said.

"Huh?" Kaguya asked, her train of thought derailed.

"Long story." Miyuki said.

"As I was saying, Eren didn't kidnap me. According to him, he had no idea that I was kidnapped until it was reported on the news." She said.

"Really?" Ai asked.

"When he found out, he said he would rescue me." Kaguya said.

"He rescued you?" Fujiwara asked.

"Yea, he did." She nodded. "He rescued both me and Hayasaka. Even Kaicho."

"When were you kidnapped?" Ai asked, looking at Miyuki.

"Eren needed help, someone he could trust. Since I love Shinomiya-" Kaguya blushed when he said that. "He knew he could trust me to help."

"He put you at risk?" Miyako asked.

"He had it under control, but he wanted to get her out without a fight." Miyuki said. "I messed up and he came in violently and pushed them back. He saved her."

"You did too." Kaguya blushed.

"Not like him, he beat five trained guys easily in the time it took me to barely win against one." Miyuki said.

"Why didn't he go to the police if he knew where you were?" Meimei asked.

"The thing is, it wasn't the Nakano-Kai that kidnapped me. It was Yoshida." Kaguya said. "He kidnapped me in order to make me believe that it was the Nakano-Kai, that way my father would go on a manhunt and rig trials against them as a way to ensure they were defeated."

Yoshida, the leader of the most powerful Yakuza in Tokyo. Kaguya told the media that it was the Nakano-Kai that kidnapped her, even her own father. Why would she lie?

"I kept it a secret because Yoshida was having his men protect Ai." Kaguya said.

"Protect me?" Ai asked.

"Yes, the Nakano-Kai saw Eren as a threat, so they targeted you because he cares about you." Kaguya explained. "Yoshida manipulated Eren into helping them by providing people to protect you, so he begged me to lie and maintain that it was the Nakano-Kai

that kidnapped me so that Yoshida would never find out that Eren saved me, and it ensured Yoshida didn't lose men to police raids so that you could stay protected."

Ai didn't know what to think about that. Eren by his presence put Ai in danger, but he was also doing so much to protect her at the same time. She didn't know how to feel about that.

"Regardless of if he protected her or not, he still put her in danger." Meimei said.

"No, he didn't." Ai said.

"Mama?" Ruby said as she saw her mother get sad.

"What do you mean Ai?" Meimei asked.

"Eren kept trying to push me away, especially when we first met." She said. "I pursued him, I was the one who almost dragged him away to spend time with me. I was the one who went after him. Maybe... maybe he was trying to stay away so I didn't get hurt... and he fell for me to the point that he took the risk to be close to me. It's not his fault."

"Eren said he's desperate, that he has no way to get a job or even get food. He came to Japan against his will and was stuck here without papers or anything. He got into crime because he was desperate and apparently, he was too skilled and valuable to get out." Kaguya explained.

That made sense to Ai. Eren was desperate. She knew that something very bad happened just before Eren came to Japan. Something that caused the death of people he cared about. Something that forced him into a life of crime.

Ai thought back to the past week... how destroyed and broken she felt after losing her career, reputation, and Eren. How angry and

alone she felt. How isolated from the world due to everything that happened.

But her children pulled her together. They helped her to get over it and at least find something to keep moving with dignity and a head held high. Without them... she wondered what she would have done to herself.

Eren had no one. He had no one to help him, no one to cry to, not even anyone to get angry at. He was isolated in a strange place that he knew nothing about, with no food or future, and no one to help him. Is it any wonder that he did something desperate?

"I had no idea." Meimei said.

"That does sound tough." Miyako said.

"I looked into some information about Yoshida." Kaguya said. "And Eren's Russian friend."

"Where'd you get that?" Fujiwara asked.

"One of my father's associates is the director of Naicho, the Cabinet Intelligence and Research Office. So, he let me have some information." Kaguya said.

"Wait, how? Isn't that kind of stuff classified?" Saitou asked.

"I used the charm befitting a woman of class and sophistication." Kaguya pointed to herself, head held high and voice full of pride.

"Please can you tell me, I am learning more about papa's company and it'll help for a school report." Kaguya begged with her hands clasped and eyes wide.

"Of course, little lady Kagy, anything for my darling god daughter." The director smiled as he pat her head. "Can't disappoint my old friend and generous benefactor."

Yea, Kaguya didn't use any sophisticated charm. She begged like a little girl with wide puppy eyes to a man who saw her as a daughter to him.

"Yoshida recruited Eren forcefully based on intercepted phone calls they received. Additionally, the Russian he was with, who they've been hunting for two decades now, is credited in introducing Eren to Yoshida. Their file on the investigation shows that Eren was compelled to join against his will." Kaguya explained. "Additionally, that warehouse was a forced suicide mission that they intended to kill Eren with, only then involving Eren fully when he showed abnormal levels of skill and strength."

"They knew who he was?" Kaguya asked.

"According to their reports, they didn't learn about Eren until the media did. At least his name. They only got bits and pieces since the Yakuza typically talk in code in order to avoid being discovered or having their operations known."

"So." Saitou began. "Eren is an ex-Soldier from an unknown country that was forced to join the Yakuza due to his skill and abilities."

"That's what the reports assume, yes." Kaguya said. "He also has a particular hatred for human trafficking, that much he told us."

"I remember." Fujiwara said. "When he talked about that girl he saved."

"Girl?" Meimei asked.

"Eren told us about his adopted sister who was trafficked at nine-years-old." Ai explained. "Eren found the kidnappers and killed them, as a nine-year-old."

"Nine!?" Miyako yelled out.

"Yea, nine?" Meimei asked.

"Wherever Eren grew up, it was a very rough place." Kaguya said. "The reports assume that he's had military level training and experience, but based off of CCTV, they're unsure of what army or country he fought for."

"There was one thing." Ai said, thinking back. "I remember he said he was a member of Wagner squad."

"Wagner?" Saitou asked. "I heard about them on the news, they're a mercenary company based out of Russia, they were activated two years ago." He said.

"So, a child soldier and a mercenary." Kaguya thought to herself.

"Eren also said everyone he cared for is dead." Ai looked down sadly. "I felt so sorry for him, but everyone he knows is gone and I think something bad must have happened to him before he came to Japan."

"So, he was forced to into crime against his will?" Meimei asked, hoping she understood it fully.

"I believe so." Kaguya said. "There's no mentions on his past outside of speculation and his fake passport, nothing mentioning him being a member of Wagner. So, there's a lot of his past that's not known."

"Does that excuse everything though?" Meimei asked. "I mean sure, he feels bad about it, but he still kills people."

"According to the media, he's only ever targeted Yakuza members. Not a single innocent person died due to his actions." Miyuki defended.

"That was another thing about the report." Kaguya said. "Based on CCTV footage and crime scene analysis, he's repeatedly gotten into fights in crowds full of people. He often puts himself at risk in order to avoid collateral damage or hurting bystanders."

"Again, he kills people for a living." Meimei said.

"True, but he does so out of desperation." Kaguya defended.

"Why did he never go to the police?" Miyako asked. "Surely he could have claimed asylum and either had the Government assist him in finding a new country or attempting to immigrate him here. I know it's a long process, but the Government is sympathetic to many asylum seekers."

"If he was a part of Wagner, it's possible he was a criminal before. They recruited out of prisons on occasion." Saitou said.

"Plus, he's from a rural area." Meimei said. "He knows very little about technology or modern culture, so he had to have been born in a rural area. Maybe his desperation started there."

"His mother was also killed when he was ten." Ai said. "He said that she was killed by "Them", whoever that is. Maybe a gang or mafia killed his family."

"I could see that." Kaguya said. "Not saying he's innocent, but I don't think Eren is as bad as we all thought at first."

"What does it matter?" Ai asked.

"Ai." Meimei said.

"Even if everything he did was good or justifiable, it doesn't change that he's a wanted man. A trial won't see that as justifiable, and they will convict him. There's nothing I can do to be close to him." She said sadly.

"I suppose you're right." Meimei said sadly.

"Can your dad do anything?" Miyuki asked Kaguya.

"I doubt he would, he wouldn't risk much to protect a confirmed criminal." Kaguya said.

"Even if Eren saved you?" Miyuki asked.

"Technically, Eren put you in danger to save me, I doubt he'd look to kindly about that." Kaguya said.

So, there was no way to save Eren from the law. Not after everything he's done.

Ai felt as if she cared for Eren, maybe even loved him. Despite what happened, she truly did care for him. After understanding a lot of the context behind Eren's actions, maybe she could forgive him and even love him.

But how could she? If she didn't have children already, she'd gladly run away with him. But she has to consider her children's future, and a life on the run is no way to raise two... no, three children. She has a third child on the way.

She didn't even know if she could contact him. Eren was probably in hiding. If this Russian guy, Sergei she remembered his name was, avoided the police for twenty years then what hope does she have to find Eren?

"I know it's weird to bring this up, but I wanted to make sure you all had the context behind what Eren did for me." Kaguya said. "I'm not trying to change your opinion on him, but at least give you my experience with him."

"We appreciate it, Kaguya." Meimei said.

"Yea, even if it doesn't help our situation." Kyun said.

"We're all going to have to find real jobs soon, since we're no longer able to perform." Meimei said.

"Speak for yourself." Nino said. "I'm going to learn English and get an acting job in America. They actually have some respect for their performers, unlike here."

"I feel like they have the same problems." Watanabe said.

"At least they're paid much better." Nino said. "Plus, I can find myself a handsome western actor." She blushed.

Ai giggled at her friend. At least the girls would have an easier time if they went solo. If they did their marketing right, they can blame it all on Ai and avoid the scandals. Ai even hoped they would do that, since her reputation is already gone and it least it can help her friends.

"You know, I could buy Strawberry Productions." Kaguya said. "I can get an allowance increase from my father and still let you perform."

"We can't do that." Saitou said.

"An allowance increase to buy a talent agency..." Miyako whispered to herself.

"Why not?" Kaguya asked.

"Because with how damaged Strawberry Productions reputation is, we'd never be able to make a profit. You'd throw money away on something that won't bring any kind of audience." He said. "It's better to let it die."

"As much as we dreamed about filling the Tokyo Dome with glowsticks, I don't think we should continue." Miyako said, holding her stomach which just barely started to develop a baby bump.

"I nearly lost my idols a lot in the past month and a half. I can't risk their lives anymore." He said. "I'd rather focus on my own family."

"I understand." Kaguya said.

After the long talk, their meals were finally ready. It was some of the best food they ever had, likely with spices measured by the milligram to make it perfect.

Well, that was an interesting chapter. An entire conversation about Eren, and a few other stuff.

So, when I started this was supposed to be a one and done story. It would end and that's it, no titan powers, no AoT stuff, and no massive plots.

However, people were asking for it, so I compromised. I'll be doing a sequel so that the original vision won't be compromised. Now the idea for the sequel started back around the first concert arc, so it is fully planned out and there are foreshadowing elements. I debated about adding overt foreshadowing, like Ruby's scene in this chapter since I didn't want this story to have sequel bait or foreshadowing, but I'm adding it.

That way, you guys can believe that I do have this planned out and am not entirely winging it lol. That being said, Ruby's moment is a sequel bait thing, so don't expect to get answers anytime soon.

Hope you guys enjoyed.

Hoshino Ai is Kidnapped

Chapter 43: Hoshino Ai is Kidnapped

A week had passed by after their talk about Eren and Ai decided to get some fresh air and move around for a bit. She felt so cooped up in the mansion and decided that it was time for her and her children to stretch their legs a bit and do something since the Nakano-Kai were now completely gone.

Well, not children, since Aqua was saying he was feeling too tired after taking some of his medication. So, Ai let him stay at the mansion and rest up while her and Ruby had a little mother and daughter time together. Ruby was thrilled of course since she was always so jealous of her time with Ai.

With her ballcap and glasses, Ai was once again disguised in public. Ruby didn't really need one, but she got her a little baseball cap as well to fit with her cute little dress and leggings. It contrasted well to Ai's calf length slacks, T-shirt, and suit jacket. She wanted to look professional a bit.

It was also early in the morning since Ai wanted to make sure she went out when there were few people. Before, getting recognized as an idol could get her swarmed by fans. Now, getting spotted could result in a confrontation that she had no interest of dealing with. So, she made sure she went out when there was almost no one on the streets and stayed away from the busiest areas.

It felt good to walk around again, especially with her daughter.

"Finally, you come out of hiding." Ai turned as she heard a familiar voice.

"H-hello?" She asked.

Right out of an alleyway was the Russian man that Eren worked with, Sergei she remembered. The man who was apparently wanted by the Naicho intelligence office for the past two decades.

"Do you have any idea how much trouble you are to meet up with? This has been a pain to fake delays for two weeks." He said in an annoyed tone.

Ai started to crouch down in order to pick up Ruby and run, not trusting herself or her daughter to be around this criminal. Before she could though, Sergei stepped forward and practically wall slammed her next to a small white car. With one hand blocking her avenue of escape, she was practically trapped by the large Russian man.

"Please don't run, it would only get difficult if you did." He said.

"If you don't leave me alone, I'll scream for help." Ai said, trying to sound intimidating but failing.

"I wouldn't recommend that." Sergei said, opening his trench coat and showing something under his shoulder.

Ai gasped in surprise. Under his armpit, in a holster, was a pistol of some kind. Ai knew nothing of guns, but she knew that he had a pistol of some kind and was too close for Ai to escape.

"M-mama." Ruby said in a small and scared voice. She hugged Ai's leg, terrified of the large man and unsure of what to do.

"Get in the car." He said, opening the rear door and motioning for her to get inside.

"Please, let my daughter go." She said.

"No, it's not good to leave a kid alone on the street, now get in." He said forcefully.

"If you shoot me, the cops will come." Ai tried one last time to persuade the man.

"They've tried for twenty years; I doubt they'll be able to." He chuckled. "Now, get in."

Ai had no choice. Even if she couldn't escape the cops, she couldn't risk getting on his bad side since he could easily shoot her or her daughter. Ai got into the back seat with Ruby, who was whimpering from the fear since they were getting kidnapped.

After Sergei closed the door and walked around to the driver side, Ai tried to open the door but it wouldn't open.

"Child lock." Sergei said as he got into the drivers seat. "You won't be able to get out before I have time to react." He said, starting the car and driving away from where he took her.

Ai was now properly terrified. She had no idea what to do. She couldn't fight this man or escape without putting her life or her daughters in danger.

"M-mama... what's going on?" Ruby asked.

"It's ok, we'll be ok." Ai said.

Ai looked out the window, thinking that she could try signal-

"Don't think about it." Sergei said, looking at her through the rear-view mirror.

"Please, what do you want with us?" Ai asked.

"Are you asking why an international criminal is kidnapping someone?" Sergei chuckled.

Ai didn't know what to say. She had ideas and none of them seemed good.

"I'm hungry, you and the little one like McDonalds, right?" He asked.

What? What kind of question was that to someone you just recently kidnapped?

"S-sure?" Ai said, unsure of what he was getting at.

"There's nice one nearby, we can get some food. Dine in?" He asked.

Dine in... as in go into the store where other people-

"And if you try to signal other people while we're inside, I'll shoot you." He said, though his tone wasn't threatening at all.

"What do you want?" Ai asked, getting frustrated now.

"I'm thinking a quarter pounder with fries." He said. "Maybe coke too."

"That's not-"

"Little one like chicken nuggets? All kids like chicken nuggets." He said.

Sergei pulled up to the parking lot, got out of the car, opened Ai's door, and escorted her and Ruby into the McDonalds. He was too close for Ai to try and escape, not to mention she was holding Ruby's hand, and it would waste too much time picking her up and running before he could react.

When he got to the front of the line, the girl at the register held her arms up in an X position to Sergei.

" *No English.* " She said in very broken English.

"First off." Sergei said in his normal accented Japanese, taking the girl by surprise. "I speak Japanese well enough to be understood. Second, English is my third language. My mother language is Russian, so I appreciate it if you would kindly take my order."

The woman bowed and apologized, not expecting him to know Japanese so well.

"Anyway, I'll get a Quarter Pounder with large fries and coke. No salt on the fries, but can I get a packet of salt on the side. The girl will take a... what do you want?" He turned to Ai.

She was seriously confused... is this a kidnapping or a poor attempt at a dinner date?

"Are you watching weight or anything, your belly is looking a bit bigger." If Ai wasn't terrified for her life, she'd actually be offended. "Not sure? Ok, she'll have kids meal cheeseburger with water. Little one will have chicken nuggets. You still do the toy thing?" He asked.

"We haven't done that in years sir." She said.

"Damn, kid would like a toy." He said. "Oh well, thank you."

Sergei escorted Ai over to a booth away from any other customers, though there were few in the store this early.

"I do love how these serves lunch 24/7." He said. "I hate the breakfast. You know, there is a fascinating thing about McDonalds that not a lot of people know. Do you want to know?"

"Do I have a choice?" Ai asked, Ruby was holding onto her while she sat down.

"No." Sergei said. "Ok, so McDonalds is the very first fast food store to incorporate a drive through. It started in a town called Sierra Vista in the US State of Arizona. Do you know why they did?"

Ai didn't reply, still scared and very confused.

"I'll tell you, it's because in Sierra Vista is a US Army base called Fort Huachuca, it's an Army base where they train Military Intelligence Soldiers. Now, back in the day, Soldiers were not allowed to be off

base in uniform. They could drive off base but could not leave their cars while in uniform. Don't ask me why." He chuckled.

"So, what McDonalds did was they put a window and a register on the side of their building, so Soldiers during lunch time didn't have to leave their car. Not only did it let them eat without changing out of uniform, it made it even faster to get your food. Soon, other McDonalds adopted this and other fast food industries adopted it as well. Isn't that amazing?"

"Ok..." Ai said. "Why is this relevant?"

"It's not, just making small talk. You seem very stressed right now."

Of course she's stressed! She's getting kidnapped!

"Oh, food is ready. Stay here or I'll shoot you." He chuckled as he went up to get the food.

After bringing the tray back Sergei took his unsalted fries, opened the packet of salt, and poured it on the fries.

Why did he order no salt if-

"It's because if you order no salt, they have to make a fresh batch, meaning you always get hot fries." How does he know what she's thinking? "So I get salt on the side to enjoy hot and crunchy fries."

"That's kind of rude to the workers." Ai said.

"Yes, because being rude is the worst crime I've committed today." He laughed.

Ai couldn't argue with that.

Sergei started eating his burger and fries as if it was the best thing he's ever tasted. He seemed like he was having a good time, which was odd considering Ai was terrified along with Ruby.

"You're not eating." Sergei said with a full mouth. "Don't like it, want me to get you another one?"

"What is this about!" Ai yelled, though in a low voice.

She was getting upset at being jerked around like this. First, he kidnaps her at gunpoint and then takes her and Ruby out to get food. What was wrong with this guy?

"Just wanted to talk about Eren honestly." He said. "I can see the depression is hitting you hard. You need to be careful so you don't gain weight."

Was the baby bump that noticeable? Ai felt a little self-conscious about that.

"You're not offended." He said, finishing the burger. "That's weird, normally-" Wait... "Oh shit, you're pregnant." He realized.

"Y-yes..." Ai confirmed, not sure where this line of conversation would go.

"Huh, congrats I guess." He said. "I just kidnapped Eren's baby mother... I hope he never finds out." He said to himself.

"Why do you want to talk about Eren?" Ai asked.

"I figured there was some misunderstanding between you two and I just figured you two should talk to each other." Sergei said. "Eren is kind of broken up about it and isn't keen on approaching you because of how scared you were."

He was broken up about what happened? He was really that upset?

"He doesn't show it, but right now he wants to get smuggled out of the country and go climb a mountain or something." Sergei said.

Ai giggled a bit at that, thinking it was kind of funny that he would do that when he was upset after what they talked about before.

"I've been making up delays for two weeks now since I've been trying to get at you. But the Shinomiya manor is impenetrable. He's actually getting frustrated and it's becoming a hazard to my health." Sergei chuckled.

"There's not much to talk about." Ai said. "Even if we did see each other, what would it accomplish? He's still a wanted man."

"Yea, and to be honest, a lot of it is my fault." Sergei said.

"Kaguya said you got him into crime." Ai said.

"How does she know?" Sergei asked. "Eh, doesn't matter. But yes, I did. He was stupid and went too deep, but I did give him his first job."

"So, what are you going to say? That I should feel bad about it? Because I do. I do feel bad. We all talked about it, and I feel terrible about what happened to him. We all did, even if some of them didn't agree with him."

"I'm not here to give you a pity party moment." Sergei said. "I'm here to give you perspective on who he is as a criminal and as a desperate man. From the lense of someone who went through the same thing." Sergei said.

"Eren said he was a child soldier." Ai said.

"Really, he didn't tell me. Makes sense since he'd trust you more than me." Sergei chuckled. "Yes, Eren fought in a war."

"Who was he with?" Ai asked.

"No idea, he keeps a lot of his past hidden. To be honest, you probably know more about his past than me." He said. "Eren did some bad things and made some tough choices because if he didn't, he'd die. When I served the Soviets in the Afghan War, if my commander ordered me to kill a bunch of innocent villagers, I did it. If I didn't, he'd kill me. So, I prioritized my life over the lives of others."

"Isn't that illegal?" Ai asked.

"Even by Russian laws, yes it was illegal. But who was going to do anything about it? No one. The west didn't care, and my Commander was competent enough to not get in trouble. Little Ryadovoy Sergei... that's a private by the way, wasn't important enough to even say no. Do I regret what I did, sometimes. But I'd be dead if I didn't."

"I see." Ai said.

"I became an Officer over the course of the war, and when I became Major, I was stuck in logistics. Basically, a dead end for our career. So, I sold surplus stuff illegally, so I didn't starve. I stole my own subordinates pay and when the Soviet Union collapsed, I was on the run because they were looking for scapegoats. I was not a high enough rank to survive, so I fled."

"Is that how you ended up in Japan?" Ai asked.

"I did some smuggling jobs between Vladivostok and Japan, which eventually let me make my own businesses in the smuggling industry. This was into the ninties by this point. I met a beautiful Japanese woman too and fell in love. Even had a son with her."

It's funny, Ai was starting to see a connection here.

"What happened?" Ai asked.

"She found out, and well, now I'm single." Sergei chuckled. "You know, I imagine my son would be about your age now." He said.

"So what are you suggesting?" Ai asked. "Should I put myself and my children at risk for love? Try to make it work when the police are hunting him and Yakuza are targeting me in order to manipulate him?"

"Honestly, my opinion? I'd say forget about him and move on with your life." He said with a chuckle.

Seriously? That's his advice? He kidnapped her to tell her that?

"So, that's what I should do?" Ai asked.

"I don't know. I'm not here to tell you what you should or shouldn't do." Sergei said. "I'm here to give you perspective. Perspective that maybe your friends can't give because they don't understand desperation or having to do bad things to survive. How even though sometimes we're forced to do bad things, doesn't inherently make people bad. Do you think some money trouble can compare to starving in a cold Russian winter?"

"I guess not." Ai said.

"When my love found out, we actually talked about it. We met up over a McDonalds meal and had a very long talk about what we should do. In the end, we both agreed we should stay apart so that not only would she be safe, but so will our son. While I'll admit it broke me up inside, we came to an understanding. A man's job is to protect his woman and child, and sometimes that means staying away."

"So stay or forget about him. I don't know what to do." Ai said.

"What I'd say, is do what I did. Talk with him. Decide if you both want to prioritize you and your children's safety or to pursue love no matter the challenges. Even if it ends things between you two, at least discussing it can give you both closure and make it easier to move on. Or maybe you decide that you love each other so much that the risk is worth it. I can't tell you; it all depends on what you two decide together."

Ai took a single fry from Sergei's meal and took a bite out of it, trying so hard to think about what she should do.

"You know, when he first talked about you, he tried so much to say how he wished you would leave him alone. How he found you innocent and believed you to be a good woman. How he wished nothing more for you to stay away so you could be safe and happy away from him." Sergei said.

"He said that?" Ai asked.

"I think early on, he began to fall for you. But he tried so hard to push you away because there haven't been any safe or calm moments in his life. He was scared of something happening to you and your children. And I have no doubt that he'd kill an entire city to keep you and your children safe."

Ai giggled for a moment when she noticed that Ruby finished her chicken nuggets. Even though they were kidnapped, it didn't stop her from wanting to eat delicious food.

"Anyway, you should go home. Want me to take you back?" Sergei asked.

"Do I have a choice?" Ai asked.

"This time, Da." He nodded. "I'm too old to be on a date with someone like you. I prefer prostitutes at the red light district."

Ai scrambled to cover Ruby's ears before she heard this old man brag about engaging in prostitution. What was wrong with this guy?

"Wait, all that and you threatened to shoot me?" Ai asked, confused as to why he would threaten to kill her only to give her advice.

"I was lying." Sergei laughed. "I doubt you would have accepted a normal invitation to talk. So, I had to get creative. Anyway, I'll tell Eren that you want to talk."

She actually hated this guy.

"Ok." Ai nodded. "Also, I think I'd rather walk. I really don't trust you."

"I'd actually be offended if you did trust me." Sergei laughed. "Have a nice day."

That was so weird, Ai thought to herself. She picked up Ruby and walked out, who had calmed down after she realized Sergei wouldn't hurt them.

"Does this mean Eren could still be our papa?" Ruby asked.

"I don't know Ruby-Chan." Ai said honestly.

Regardless, she needed to talk with Eren.

One Day Later

" According to recent reports, it has been confirmed that Hoshino Ai, the former star of the controversial group B-Komachi, has been reported missing as of yesterday. Her manager, Saitou Ichigo, has filed a police report after she failed to return to her address, which has not been released due to the recent controversy. "

" Many former fans of the twenty-year-old idol have taken to social media, stating that it was likely the Akuma no Ko, Eren Yeager who kidnapped her after being discovered. It is assumed that he stalked her and kidnapped her after she rejected him upon learning of his criminal affiliations. "

" At this time, the police have not released a statement and are currently investigating the situation. Until we have more information we will attempt to keep the people of Tokyo up to date. "

"You look upset." Sergei said as Eren turned the TV off.

"That bastard!" Eren growled out loud. "I should have known he'd take Ai."

"Looks like it." Sergei said.

"How'd he even get her?" Eren asked.

"I may have contacted her." Sergei said.

"What!?" Eren asked. "I asked you to stay away from her!"

"And you're getting too damned depressed over her!" Sergei yelled back. "I figured it would be good if you two could at least talk instead of moping around like a bunch of teenagers!"

"And now Yoshida has Ai!" Eren yelled back.

"Probably little blonde girl too, since she was with Ai." Sergei mentioned.

"Ruby too?" Eren asked.

"Yea, and her unborn child too." Sergei said.

"Oh shit, you didn't know?" Sergei asked.

"No... no I didn't." Eren said, in a state of shock.

She was pregnant? That meant that she was with child, his child. Eren's second child. Another child he was going to abandon because of his choices.

"We'll figure this out." Sergei said. "I'll find her, and we do another rescue operation. Get her and children, both living and soon to be living to safety."

Eren sat down on the couch in his little makeshift apartment in the warehouse. His mind racing at what was going on. He was completely unsure of what he was going to do, but he had a few ideas.

Suddenly, his phone started to ring. He took it and looked at the number. He recognized it, it was Yoshida.

"Answer it." Sergei said.

Eren hit accept and put the phone on speaker.

Ai was trapped in a small room for the past few hours with Ruby. It was a relatively nice room, though with large and heavy wooden doors that only had handles on the outside of it. There was a nice red couch and a bookshelf with various different stories for entertainment, but she wasn't focused on that.

The last thing she remembered was leaving the McDonalds and then it was a blur. She was attacked, she thinks, and kidnapped a second time in a single day. After waking up, she and Ruby were trapped in this room.

"Mama, I'm getting tired of being taken." Ruby said.

Ai would have laughed at that if she wasn't so terrified right now.

"Don't worry Ruby-Chan, I'm sure the police are looking for us right now." Ai said.

"I wish Eren was still here, he always saved us." Ruby whined.

Yea, he did.

Suddenly, the door opened and a man in a black suit and a small gut walked in. He was older, maybe on his forties if she had to guess, but he looked intimidating and important.

"W-who are you?" Ai asked.

"You can call me Yoshida." The man said.

Yoshida, the crime boss of the largest gang in Tokyo? The man who employed Eren?

"Please, sit down. We have some things to discuss." Yoshida said.

Ai picked Ruby up in her arms and sat down on the couch while Yoshida got a chair and sat across from her. He didn't have any guards with him, though Ai knew that was because she could never hope to win in a fight against him.

"I-if you're trying t-to leverage m-me against Eren it won't work. We b-broke up." Ai said, hoping to convince him to release her. She knew it was pointless though.

"Leverage? Oh, we're long past that." Yoshida chuckled. "Actually, I was hoping to only get you. The kids would have been leverage, but I guess the boy will be the only thing. You and your daughter will be his punishment."

Ruby whined at that, burying her head in Ai's shoulder as she held her.

"Punishment... for what?" Ai asked.

"You see, when Shinomiya escaped, I didn't think too much on it. Though it made things harder, she still kept that narrative that the Nakano-Kai took her, so I let it go at the time. Even though Eren was the one to free her."

How does he know about that? Kaguya said Eren kept it a secret.

"Tell me girl, do you and Eren believe I am stupid? Believe that after decades of leading the most powerful Yakuza group in the Kanto Region, that I could fall for such a pitiful lie?" He asked.

"I never kne-"

Ai was cut off as Yoshida backhanded her, causing Ruby to cry as Ai fell to her side on the couch.

"You know, it's strange. After she escaped, you and Kaguya became such good friends. She stayed at your apartment, and she gave you

shelter in her mansion. But I could calk that up to that one time you met her when your son ran away."

How does he know that!? How long has he been watching her!? Ai was beginning to feel terrified and creeped out.

"Then there was that boy, Shirogane. The little class president at that rich kid academy. Who Eren visited frequently before Shinomiya escaped. I have his face on our CCTV cameras. So odd that someone Eren began to meet with suddenly had the courage and knowhow to save a girl from the Yakuza."

"But you want to know the thing that really sinched it. The thing that really clued me in on the fact that Eren saved her? Tell me, what Japanese police officer rushes into a shootout alone? A single Special Assault Officer assaults a position? I know Shinomiya, the patriarch Shinomiya. He'd send in a private army if he knew his daughter was there. When you put all three of these together, it's pretty damn obvious."

Ai stayed on her side on the couch, her face still stinging and desperately holding onto Ruby. She was terrified.

"So... leverage? No, you're no longer leverage. You're a punishment."

"W-what are you going to do?" Ai asked.

"Believe it or not, you're in luck." He said.

"L-luck?" Ai asked.

"You're very valuable. And I have a buyer for you. But let's make sure Eren is in the loop too."

Yoshida took out his phone and dialed a number that she assumed was Eren's. After a moment, Eren icked up and Yoshida put it on speaker.

For a moment, there was silence. Ai could hear a gentle breathing coming from the phone, so she knew Eren was listening. She thought about calling out for help, but it was pointless. She was trapped.

" Eren, I wanted to talk. How are you? "

Silence.

" You know, after saving the Shinomiya girl, I was willing to let that go since it didn't negatively impact me. But your insubordination is getting on my nerves. I'm sure you know that I have the washed-up idol and her daughter. Truthfully, I didn't intend to get her daughter, but can't let her go now. "

" So, she will act as your punishment. I found a buyer for her. Don't worry, it'll actually be a merciful fate. Ever heard of North Korea? "

North Korea!? He was going to sell her and Ruby to North Korea?

" Interesting thing, they typically kidnap Japanese animators to help on their propaganda films. Actually, they're planning to start their own idol industry. Now, they could do it from scratch, but they're interested in recruiting some former talent. And what better talent than Ai of the now defunct B-Komachi? "

" Now, the first few weeks may be tough on her and the little one. North Korea typically re-educates their guests, which can get pretty violent. But once she is re-educated, she'll live the life of a proper celebrity. She'll even get her own career back. She'll live a life of luxury and even able to continue the career she loves so much. Isn't that great Ai? " He turned to her.

" You and your daughter will get to be the most famous idols in an entire country. Think of it, North Korean people are so hungry many resort to cannibalism. You'll give love and hope to a destitute people. I'd say they deserve it more than Japanese fans. Of course, all your songs will be propaganda, but who cares, right? As long as your

spreading love and hope. You'll even learn a new language. Hangul is very easy to learn from what I understand. "

" Now, Eren. " He went back to the phone. " The boy, her son, is now the leverage. I can think of worse fates for him. But as for Ai and the daughter, you won't have to worry. They'll be safe and even rich in North Korea. So think of it as a merciful punishment. "

There was silence after that. Ai wondered what Eren would say. She could tell Yoshida expected anger, sadness, begging, or anything normal. After all, Eren was one man against a Yakuza group that numbered in the thousands.

What could he possibly do to save her?

" I told you that if you ever used her against me, I'd show you why I was called the Devil of Paradis. " Eren said calmly. " What happens next is on you. "

Eren hung up.

Ai looked up at Yoshida's face. His smug grin was gone, replaced with... confusion? He looked like he saw something that wasn't quite right. Something that approached the uncanny valley. Something that didn't make sense.

Ai had to agree. She expected Eren to react how anyone would. Either anger or even begging. But his voice was calm, as if he was reading a grocery list or stating a random fact. He might of well have said that the sun is hot with how matter of fact he was.

Then he hung up. Eren treated the whole situation as if he was the one in control and the one with the leverage. Ai could tell there was a slight chill in Yoshida's spine at how uncanny it was, but he scoffed it off. He probably assumed Eren was in shock and didn't know what to do.

"Anyway, please make yourself comfortable. Obviously, no electronics, but you have a bathroom and some books for entertainment. Even kids' books for the little one. I don't want you to be too stressed before you go overseas." He said, leaving Ai and Ruby alone.

"M-mama. Are you ok?" Ruby asked.

"Yes, mama is ok." She tried to smile.

"What's going to happen to us?" She asked.

Considering how Eren acted, Ai actually began to hope for something impossible.

"I think papa is going to save us." She smiled as she held her daughter.

"You do realize he has you completely outmatched, right?" Sergei said. "I mean, this isn't the Nakano-Kai."

"Since I've been here Sergei, I have struggled to adapt to this new technology. Every time I got used to something, some new thing would happen that I couldn't anticipate. The technology, tactics, and even the culture was so different. Now, I'm used to it." Eren said.

"That's great I guess." Sergei shrugged.

"Not to mention, since I was trying to hide from the authorities, I've had to be subtle and couldn't take too many risks." Eren said.

"You blew up an entire warehouse by yourself, and you call that subtle?" Sergei asked.

"For me, it is subtle." Eren said.

"That's actually terrifying." Sergei said.

"And I always had to be careful so Ai was never in danger. Now though, now nothing will stop me from killing Yoshida."

"Well, if we're going to do this, we'll need a base of operations." Sergei said.

"We?" Eren asked. "I thought you never get involved."

"I won't, but someone needs to find information and supply you with weapons and explosives. All free of course." Sergei smiled.

"So, another warehouse?" Eren asked.

"Terrible idea, we'll need a new place, so Yoshida doesn't track you down. He knows where most of mine are." Sergei thought. "How about we pay visit to Ai's old boss and borrow their dance studio. It's got enough space to store things."

"He won't agree to it and would probably call the police." Eren said.

"I can be pretty convincing." Sergei chuckled. "Just promise me you'll tell me where the whole "Devil of Paradis" nickname comes from."

"I earned it in my own world when I wiped out eighty percent of the known population." Eren said honestly.

"Just tell me the real story after we save single mom." He said.

"Sure." Eren shrugged, knowing Sergei would never believe the truth. Eren's sure he can come up with a lie after he saves Ai. "Make sure to bring that." Eren said, pointing to his ODM gear.

"The weird grappling hook thing?" Sergei asked. "It looks like a grappling hook, mixed with scuba gear, a motorcycle, and swords." He said.

"I'm almost done with repairs. It'll be useful, trust me."

"Whatever you say." Sergei shrugged.

So, this was an experiment on expectations. It's titled "Hoshino Ai is kidnapped", which makes the reader get worried. Then Sergei does his bit, and the reader breathes a sigh of relief. Then Ai actually is kidnapped, a double fake out lol. Let me know if it worked lol.

Up until now, Eren has been adapting and unable to anticipate. He's been in hiding, and he's had Ai hold him back since he was trying to keep her safe. Now, the gloves are off. He's adapted, no longer hiding, and pissed. The Devil of Paradis is back lol.

Interesting thing, I really wanted the two conversations between Ai's friends and Sergei. It's two conversations that show very different perspectives in opinions. On one hand, you have B-Komachi and Love is War crew with their very first world views, contrasted to Sergie's darker past. Ai needed these perspectives to fully come to an understanding of what she wants.

I also hope I did the reveal of Yoshida knowing Eren saved Kaguya. I didn't want to foreshadow it, but I wanted it to be a logical conclusion that made sense. It's less someone told him and more that he pieced it together because of how odd certain things about it were. I hope that worked lol.

I was going to stretch Sergeis conversation out this entire chapter, but decided I needed to get things moving lol. We've had the drama, the funny, now to get on with it lol.

Hope you guys enjoy this one.

Three Days of Hell

Chapter 44: Three Days of Hell

First Night

Meimei, Saitou, and Miyako were busy cleaning up their dance studio of their possessions. With the loss of their reputation and the controversies they're facing, Saitou and B-Komachi were unable to stay afloat. He had to start getting rid of a lot of his assets in order to prepare for any future business decisions he'd have to make.

Ai and Meimei offered to help with moving stuff out... however...

" *Damn it!* " Saitou yelled out as he accidentally dropped a box.

" *Ichigo, are you ok?* " Miyako asked.

" *Just dropped another one.* " He said.

Miyako could tell that her husband was taking Ai's kidnapping hard. He was a bit temperamental on small things and would sometimes just stare into space. She knew for a fact that her husband was blaming himself for what happened to Ai and Ruby.

Miyako told Kaguya that after they were no longer in danger, Miyako would take Aqua in until Ai was found... or if the worse should happen. She wishes Ruby was here with them, but she could do nothing until the Police eventually found Ai.

" *Don't worry, the police are looking for Ai and Ruby. They'll find them.* " Miyako tried to say.

" *Yea, it's no trouble at all.* " Meimei tried to stay positive. " *I'm sure they're just preparing for a police raid or something.* "

" I know... I just wish I did more. " Saitou said sadly.

Miyako fully admits to herself that she married Saitou for the money and to meet handsome actors. However, after four years of caring for the twins and helping her husband, she can say she did fall in love with him.

The way he devoted so much of his time, resources, and life into protecting Ai made Miyako respect and admire him. She saw him as a man who cared deeply for the people in his life and she knew he would make a great father, which was why she was excited to be pregnant.

So, to see him in this state, so tired and scared for Ai's safety, broke her heart. He thought the world of Ai and saw her very much as a daughter. He may have overstepped his bounds a few times to protect her, but his heart was in the right place.

Though, she couldn't blame him now since his paranoia ended up being right. This is why she swore off of bad boys like Eren, too much effort after the initial fun stage.

As for everyone's feelings on what happened, there was a lot of confusion from the media's reaction. Everyone who knew Eren asked the big question...

Did Eren kidnap Ai and Ruby?

Everyone was split. On one hand, they could all guess that Eren and Ai did greatly care for each other. Not to mention, Eren did a lot of what he did to protect her, so it makes no sense that he would kidnap her.

However, there were two theories everyone had. Either Eren did love Ai and kidnapped her so they could be forcefully together, or someone was using Ai against Eren. Most believed the latter but didn't rule out the previous entirely. Only Ai really knew Eren well.

" There's always the chance that Eren is looking for her. " Miyako said.

" I really don't think that would make me feel better. " Saitou said. " Even if he does love Ai, he doesn't have the resources that the police have. So, he'd never be able to save her. "

Miyako heard footsteps near the door and turned to look at it, expecting it to be Meimei.

"Er-"

She said in shock.

"What!?" Saitou asked, following her gaze.

"Who-" Meimei did as well.

Standing at the doorway was the most wanted man in Japan right now. Dressed in a nice black suit and a black turtleneck sweater. His black suit jacket was around his shoulders, but his arms weren't in the sleeves, looking more like a cape. His fedora was cocked at an angle on his head, making him look like a 1930s gangster.

Eren stood at the doorway with one hand in his pocket and his hip cocked. The Russian man in the trench coat stood behind him.

"Saitou." Eren said. "We need to borrow your dance studio."

Saitou was at a complete loss for words. He just shows up and starts asking to borrow their studio... the same one he's currently selling?

"Eto... no." He said, though unsure of how Eren would react.

"We're looking for Ai, so we need to borrow your space." Eren said.

"And I trust the police more than you to find her." Saitou said. "So, I'm not going to let you borrow my building... in fact, Meimei, call the police."

Meimei was somewhat paralyzed, unsure of what she should do. On the one hand, she was kind of happy she was right and Eren is looking for Ai. On the other hand, she should call the police. Eren was still a criminal and if they helped him, they would get arrested for assisting a criminal.

That, and Saitou was right. They trusted the police to find her more than Eren.

"I wouldn't do that." Eren shook his head at Meimei.

"Look, we all kind of figure you care about Ai." Meimei said as she pulled out her phone. "But you're still wanted, and we can't have you here."

"Sergei." Eren motioned to the Russian.

"Right, ok, so Saitou." Sergei walked up, making Meimei briefly stop as she got worried.

They figured Eren wouldn't hurt them, but this Russian guy was different. They only briefly interacted with him and based off of Kaguya's report, they knew he was an arms dealer. Would he hurt them? Would Eren let him?

After all, just because Eren cared about Ai doesn't mean he cares about them.

"So, good privacy settings on social media." Sergei said as he read through his phone. "But you have a pregnant wife... who is right there actually." He chuckled to himself as he put his phone away. "That makes my job easier. So, how's the baby, I do hope it makes it to term."

Saitou immediately stood between Sergei and Miyako, using himself as a shield at the not-so-subtle threat. Meimei almost dropped her phone as Miyako was threatened, and Miyako herself widened her eyes in fear.

"We're using this building, and we can't have the police interfering."
Eren said.

"And if they do, I have contacts that can take revenge for me."
Sergei said, giving a subtle wink to Miyako.

"Ok... I get it." Saitou said, admitting defeat. "But if you're discovered here, we'll all get arrested for helping you."

"Why do you think I care?" Sergei asked. "I threatened your wife and unborn baby; why would I care about your freedom?"

"I guess you don't." Saitou said.

"Just tell the police I threatened to kill you, which is true." Sergei chuckled. "They won't arrest you."

"Eren, we know you might be looking for Ai." Meimei said as she put down her phone at the threat. "But please, if there's any information you know then you have to tell the police. They can save her."

"I have no doubt they can." Eren said. "If it was anyone else who kidnapped her then I would tell the police. But not Yoshida."

"Are you saying you're putting her life at risk for some macho bravery thing or something?" Miyako asked. "Or are you so bent on revenge against this guy that you want to deal with it personally? What about Ai? Do you care if she's in the crossfire?"

"Yoshida did it because of my skills. Because I'm such a good fighter. Everyone in the criminal world knows about me after what I accomplished. So, they won't stop trying to recruit me or use Ai against me." Eren said.

"What does that have to do with anything?" Meimei asked.

"Even if the police save her, Ai will be targeted again so long as I live. So, I'm going to show the whole criminal world why you never touch the people I care about. I'll show them just how much of a devil

I can be when pushed. And eliminating Yoshida's Yakuza group will be what I use."

His determination was almost terrifying. Despite them knowing that one man can't do anything against a Yakuza group that big, his confidence almost made them believe him. Eren had this feeling of confidence and focus about him, something that he lacked before.

Before, Eren seemed like he was stumbling around without any clear direction. Ai gave him some motivation and direction, but now he seemed terrifying in how committed he was to destroying the Yakuza and saving Ai.

Sure, he fought that one warehouse, but there's no way he can do much. He was a single man against the most powerful Yakuza group in the Kanto Region.

"I'm not asking your permission Saitou, I'm telling you." Eren said. "I won't threaten you, but if you want Ai returned safely, you'll trust me."

Saitou almost believed him. However, if not for his wife being threatened, he'd call the cops when Eren wasn't looking.

"Fine." Saitou agreed. "I'll let you use my studio, and I won't call the police." He relented.

"Seriously?" Meimei asked.

"Don't you have a husband?" Sergei asked.

"I-I mean... No problem." She winked and held up a peace sign, defaulting to her idol persona out of fear.

"Please stop doing that, it still creeps me out." Eren said.

"Anyway, I need some help bringing guns and equipment from the garage." Sergei said to Saitou.

"O-ok?" Saitou asked, not understanding Sergei's meaning.

"Get working, I want to get them up here." He said.

Sergei forced the group to start bringing supplies up. While Saitou went down to get the boxes of stuff, Sergei walked over to Eren who was alone. Miyako went to help, for no other reason than to be away from Sergei. He freaked her out.

"So, how do we do this exactly?" Eren asked.

"There are two options mainly." Sergei said. "You can cripple the organization by targeting their assets and money. This will completely destroy the group and prevent anyone from taking over."

"But?" Eren asked, knowing there was going to be issues.

"It would involve a lot of civilian casualties since you'd be targeting banks and other places of business. Too many people would get in the way."

Eren didn't want this. As much as he wanted to save Ai, he didn't want to default to killing and slaughtering a bunch of people again. He would do it if there was no other way, but he'd rather a different option.

"What's our second option?" Eren asked.

"We do what the Americans do when they're hunting terrorists." Sergei said. "Take out the middle leadership and create a break in the Yakuza chain of command. This will force Yoshida to intervene and re-establish the chain of command, flushing him out. It would also eliminate their command structure."

"What's the catch with this one?" Sergei asked.

"Without targeting their assets and money, you'd leave the framework for new leaders to take over. Who might retaliate against you. However, you'd avoid attacking innocent people." Sergei explained.

"That's what we'll do." Eren said. "We'll target their leadership and flush the son of a bitch out. I'm not killing innocent people again."

"Even if they retaliate?" Sergei asked.

"They'll be too scared to ever retaliate against me after this." Eren said with determination.

Sergei had a chill go up his spine. He never imagined Eren would be so terrifying.

Second Night

Yumekui was finalizing a deal for drugs to be imported from Latin America. Oyabun Yoshida wanted it done by him personally since he was one of the top commanders in the Inagawa-Kai. While not really second in command, he only answered directly to the Oyabun himself.

He was busy typing an encrypted and coded email to his contacts in Latin America so that they can arrange for a shipment that was getting sent to Russia. Japan was seen as a kind of pit stop between trade from Asia and America, even in illegal trade.

The Oyabun had put the other commanders on a high alert due to two other commanders getting attacked and killed in the past two days. Oyabun was getting pissed off and started to yell out his other commanders to kill Yeager.

Which is why Yumekui requested forty armed guards for when Yeager decided to attack.

Suddenly, Yukekui heard gunshots outside.

" *Sir.* " One member came up to him. " *We have an issue, the Akuma no Ko is attacking.* "

" Really? " Yumekui asked. " Here? Well, I guess I'll have come good news to give the Oyabun. Where's the body? Out front? "

" N-no, he's still killing guys. " He said.

" We have forty men here, and you guys are struggling with a single kid? " Yumekui asked.

" He did take out that one- "

" Fucking Nakano guys, I expect my men to have a little bit more class. " He said. " Just send a few guys out and kill him quick. No need to worry anyone else. If he wants a hero's death, we'll be sure to send his head to the idol girl. "

" U-understood. " He said, leaving him in the office.

What was with these guys? What are they worried about? A single kid? Sure, Yeager got the drop on the Nakano guys in that warehouse and he got the drop on the two other commander, but he was no match against his cell. There was a reason that the Inagawa-Kai was the strongest group in Tokyo and he had forty guys.

So, Yumekui went back to typing on his computer and finalizing some of the requests he was planning to send to his contacts in Latin America.

The gun shots were getting closer. Yumekui huffed as he realized this was going to be a big mess that was going to invite the police over. He'd have to hid some of his more illegal dealings, but it won't get too involved since the police will blame Yeager and probably just recover the body.

He'd also have the get some of the lower guys as scapegoats since they're not allowed to have guns in Japan, so he'd lose some men. Oh well, he always accounted for that.

The gun shots were getting louder, followed by explosions. He knew Yeager liked to use a large amount of explosions, but he expected him to be gunned down by now. He knew Yeager was alone since he only heard one gun getting closer and closer, only halted by the occasional burst of multiple guns.

For a precaution, Yumekui got out a custom revolver he had bought from the United States. He would be ready, even if he knew it was somewhat unwarranted.

Suddenly, the explosions and shooting stopped. Yeager must have been killed and now he had to wait for his guys to clean up. He also needed to leave soon since he'd just abandon this location and let some of his guys get arrested if they were dumb enough to stay.

Suddenly, he heard explosions again. One after the other, getting closer and closer. He heard a third one before-

BOOM!

Yumekui was thrown from his desk as a massive explosion happened next to his wall. Molten copper and shrapnel from the wall missed him since the explosion was to the side, away from him. His ears were ringing, and he felt dizzy from the explosion.

Suddenly, he was picked up by the collar and held up, staring at the angry eyes of Eren Yeager. He had an AKM on a sling around his chest and slung on his back were multiple RPGs. Not just one with multiple rounds for reloading, but multiple loaded tubes.

"Yum something, right?" Yeager asked.

"Yume-"

"I don't care." Eren said. "You're coming with me."

"How the hell-"

"After a bit of fighting, your guys started running away. They're not as disciplined as you like to believe. Especially with the police on their way." Yeager said as he started to drag the half conscious Yumekui away from his desk.

"mmmmuuupppphhh!"

The muffled screams of the Yakuza boss that Eren brought into the dance studio was going to give them nightmares. Even though they were in the next room, they could still hear his gagged and muffled screams.

Meimei had her headphones in at full blast, basically a hostage because of Eren and Sergei and almost forced to listen in on this torture. She shivered as she heard it.

Miyako and Saitou sat down on the chairs next to each other, surrounded by boxes that were full of guns and explosives. Saitou held Miyako as they heard the screaming, trying anything to take their mind off of it.

Sergei... was on his computer doing business. He seemed completely unaffected by what was going on, which was probably true.

After a few minutes, Eren dressed in a bloody apron and gloves, walked out of the room. He took the blood stained gloves off and threw them on a random box.

"S-so, did you get the information you wanted?" Meimei asked.

While she didn't really feel bad about this Yakuza leader being in pain, hearing someone get tortured is going to have to be processed with some therapy.

"Information?" Eren asked.

"Y-yea, isn't that why you tortured him?" Saitou asked.

"I have Sergei for information." Eren said. "I didn't ask him anything."

"Then why-" Meimei was cut off.

"I need him to do something for me, and I need him to be compliant." Eren said. "Normally, the first few fingernails will determine if someone breaks or doesn't. If he doesn't after one or two, he won't break. So, I decided to play some mind games and keep him guessing until I removed his last finger."

Just like Captain Levi and Regiment Commander Hanji taught him. The scouts were never afraid to engage in some torture and Eren was used to it by now. Especially being on the receiving end, like his Court Martial and nearly losing his Titan to Rod Riess.

The few members of B-Komachi were horrified to hear this. He had absolutely no issues in mutilating a man by cutting off his fingers.

"Not a bad technique." Sergei chuckled. "I used a similar one a few times, though I never end up getting prisoners in my line of work."

Meimei just wanted to go home.

"Is it really necessary to have all these guns in here?" Saitou asked. "I don't see Eren using them all."

"Only that pile is for Eren." Sergei said, pointing to a small pile in the corner, though it mostly had rocket launchers. "The rest are for Inagawa-Kai." He said.

"You're still selling to them!?" Saitou yelled.

"Da, why?" Sergei asked.

"Don't you see a problem with selling to the guys that Eren is fighting!?" He yelled.

"I like the kid, and I'm rooting for him." Sergei said with a grin. "But I'm not passing this opportunity up. They are panic buying in bulk!" He yelled happily. "Everyone is trying to get one and I can charge whatever price I want. It's glorious! AKs are now triple their usual price, and they'll pay."

"Isn't that predatory marketing?" Meimei asked.

"Da... I'm a criminal." Sergei said as it was so obvious. "Besides, they're criminals. Fuck them." He said.

"You are too." Miyako said.

"Da, fuck me too." Sergei laughed at his joke.

"I don't care how many guns they buy; it won't stop me." Eren said, not caring if Sergei was continuing to sell to them.

"This is why I like this kid." Sergei laughed. "Also, you should know Yoshida is freaking out. He's getting pissed that he lost three commanders now."

"Good, he'll have more dead soon." Eren said.

"Well, it's getting worse." Sergei said. "He's calling for a meeting with Oyabuns from other groups, they're on their way from the other prefectures now."

"Then I'll handle it." Eren said. "I'll stop his counterattack before they can even plan. Do you know where they'll be?" Eren asked.

"Da, they're going to travel on a road tonight through the city. I can show you a good ambush point." Sergei said.

"Perfect." Eren said as he picked up his Aykem and rockets. He also took an Ar-Peedee, which was apparently a drum fed machine gun, similar to ones he used in the trenches of the Mid East. However, it was much lighter.

"Seriously, RPGs are meant to be reloaded, why are you carrying a bunch of loaded tubes on your back?" Sergei asked.

"It's easier for me to just ditch them instead of reloading." Eren said.

"Whatever you say." Sergei replied.

Eren glanced at his still uncompleted ODM gear. He had a few more things he needed to do for repairs, but then it would be ready. He knew he only had ten minutes of flight time if he was conservative with gas, so he was waiting for the right moment to unveil it to Yoshida.

When he attacked Yoshida himself, then he would use it.

Third Night

Shimizu was currently in the back seat of his limo, driving to Yoshida's little get together to discuss this issue with the Akuma no Ko that he employed. He was enjoying a nice glass of Champagne.

Shimizu was the Oyabun of a Yakuza group in the Shizuoka Prefecture, and while it wasn't a powerful group, it was one of the best at smuggling weapons, drugs, and people between Japan and the America's since it accessed the coast.

It was midnight now, and the convoy of multiple Oyabuns from the bordering areas of Tokyo were on their way for the meet up. Word is, Yoshida is getting pissed at the business that this Akuma no Ko kid was causing.

While it was typically a bad idea for so many bosses to drive together in a convoy, it was decided that they would do so since there was no way that the Akuma no Ko would know about them.

In a line of five cars were the five Oyabuns and their personal security, with an additional few trucks with extra security just in case.

They drove in a small part of Tokyo late at night to avoid onlookers and the police.

BOOM!

The truck at the head of the convoy blew up, causing the cars behind to halt, flinging Shimizu forward. His expensive Champagne was spilled on his lap.

" *What was that!?* " He yelled to his driver.

" *I-I don't know, it looked like a rocket from the roofs!* " His driver yelled.

" *Well, reverse and get us-* "

BOOM!

The truck in the rear of the convoy was blown up, trapping the convoy between two burning trucks.

" *Have the security get out and-* " Shimizu was cut off.

Machine gun fire came from the top. It wasn't classic sub-machine guns, but a real one. Rifle rounds impacted the convoy, killing his guards as they got out of their cars and trucks. His own driver kept his head down, pulling out a revolver that he carried for defense. He wasn't expecting an actual fight and knew that Yoshida probably had a rat.

" *We have to get you out of here Oyabun!* " The driver yelled.

The driver got out and opened Shimizu's door, letting the older Oyabun crawl out from the bullet ridden car. The machine guns stopped firing, but by now, most of the convoy had been killed.

Shimizu looked around and saw a few other Oyabuns limp out of their cars, though he saw that two were dead and had their bodies dragged out of the cars.

" *Shit!* " His driver yelled as he took his revolver.

An RPG rocket slammed into his driver, right into his right hip. The rocket was so close that it didn't reach its minimum arming distance, so instead of exploding, it imbedded itself in his driver and through the car, pinning him by the hip into the car.

His driver was in so much pain he couldn't even scream.

A few more shots followed, this time from a pistol. Shimizu looked up and saw the Akuma no Ko walking towards him, gunning down anyone who tried to react. When he reached Shimizu, the old Oyabun knew he was done for.

"You got me kid." Shimizu laughed. "Go ahead, get it over with."

"No." The boy said.

"No?" Shimizu asked.

"I have no interest starting a war with other groups." The boy said. "All I want is Ai returned and for you to leave me the hell alone. Yoshida is the one who took her, so as long as you and the other gangs stay away, I won't have to spread this bloodshed to the other gangs."

The two other remaining Oyabun's heard the boy, surprised that this was all about that kidnapped girl. They assumed it was a power play or an attempt to take over, but they guessed the boy wanted his girlfriend back. Shimizu almost laughed at the situation.

"You killed two other Yakuza bosses kid." Shimizu said.

"And I'll kill more if you get in my way. I'm leaving you alive so that you can tell the others to stay the hell away from me." Eren said. "Don't get involved, or I will burn this whole country to the ground."

The boy turned around and left the survivors in the street. Police sirens were already getting closer as the boy, the Akuma no Ko

escaped.

What the hell has Yoshida unleashed on them? How in the hell is a single boy able to do so much?

They heard the story of him taking out that Nakano-Kai warehouse, but now he's taking out Yoshida's commanders one by one. And he just attacked an armed convoy alone, all for a single girl that he wanted back. That idol girl, Ai from B-Komachi.

Yoshida would have to solve this issue himself, because this kid is too much of a threat. They don't have the resources to send men into Tokyo on a manhunt, and if he was able to threaten Yoshida's Inagawa-Kai... what could he do to their own?

Shimizu looked at the other surviving Oyabun's, silently agreeing not to mess with this kid. Whoever replaced the other two dead Oyabun's would probably think the same.

They'd stay away, especially if this kid can take down Yoshida.

Next Morning

Ai was currently showing Ruby how to spell a few English words. She had a pen and paper that was in the room and showed Ruby how certain words were spelled.

The past three days had been boring. The room was comfortable enough, minus the constant fear of being imprisoned by criminals, but there were some books and board games that they kept in the room. So, to keep Ruby occupied, Ai either played games with her or gave her more English lessons.

She could tell Ruby was scared, but she was hopeful that her "Papa" would rescue them. Ai felt the same glimmer of hope, but she still had her doubts since Eren was only one person. How could he possibly save them?

" *Damn it!* " He heard that boss, Yoshida scream as he entered the room.

Ruby yelped and got out of her chair and ran behind Ai. Ai got up and placed herself in front of Ruby, shielding her from the Yakuza boss, who was very angry.

" *What the hell does he see in you!?* " He yelled, causing Ai to lower her head submissively in order to hopefully get him to ignore her.

" *I-I don't u-understand.* " As much as Ai tried to put up a brave front, she couldn't.

" *I lost three of my commanders and now I'm losing support from the other Yakuza's because of a fucking rat! What in the hell does he see in you!?* " He yelled, getting close to Ai. " *Who in their right mind would just start blowing things up and killing so many people like that! All for you!?* "

He was what?

" *I'm at my wits end here. I've tried contacting him and he won't pick up. He blocked me, me. Can you imagine?* " He monologued. Ai really didn't care, she didn't want to be around him right now.

" *Please, just let us go and I can talk to him.* " Ai said, seeing maybe there was a way out of this.

If Eren really was doing so much, then there was a chance he'd release her and she could talk Eren down. Maybe get him to stop fighting the Yakuza.

" *After everything he's done?* " The boss asked. " *Fuck no. I'm going to make him fucking pa-* "

His phone started to ring.

The Yakuza boss picked up his phone and Ai could see the screen. It was from Eren, who probably unblocked him so they could talk. Not

only that, but it was a FaceTime call.

"Eren-" His words died in his throat.

He turned away from Ai, which let her see the screen over his shoulder. She gasped as she saw the man on the screen, probably one of his gang members but his hands were bandaged up. Based on how the bandages were applied, he was probably missing his fingers.

He was tied to a chair, with two shadows behind him. The shadows were two people standing behind the camera, their shadows being made from a light source behind them. Ai could tell from their silhouettes that it was Eren and probably Sergei.

"Eren... let's talk." Yoshida said.

The shadow that belonged to Eren leaned over to whisper to the other one. Sergei picked up a square object and wrote something on it, before showing the tied-up man.

"H-he said release the girls." The tied-up man said.

"Eren, this is no way for two men to speak. Let us talk." Yoshida said.

Same thing, Eren leaned over to whisper to Sergei, who wrote something and showed it to the tied up man.

"You're not important e-enough." He said.

"Import-" Yoshida was getting angry. "You dare to mock me like this boy!?" He yelled into the phone and turned back towards Ai.

"O-Oyabun... please release the g-girl. He's a fucking psychopath!" The tied-up guy yelled out.

"Itai!" Ai screamed as Yoshida grabbed the back of her hair and forced her to look at the phone.

"Mama!" Ruby yelled as the boss kicked her away from Ai.

"Look at this Eren! She's right here! I don't have to sell her! I can just as easily kill her now!" Ai was getting terrified now. He wasn't acting rationally.

Ai felt tears coming up, terrified at the sudden violence. Ai hated violence; she hated it so much. It made her terrified any time it happened around her. But above all else, she hated that Ruby was in harm's way as well. Add to that, her now unborn child was in danger too.

"I can kill her now and make it slow! I can throw her to my men! I can burn that pretty face off! I can put a zip tie around her neck! The kid, I can grab her ankles and slam her against the wall! Don't Fuck with Me!"

He was getting insane now. Whatever Eren was doing was making him terrified. So much so that he was going to kill her in a fit of rage, and maybe even her daughter.

ai saw the shadows move in the same way again.

"Oyabun... h-he said i-if you do... y-you lose your only bargaining chip... and your only lifeline."

She saw Eren's back as he walked over to the Yakuza man. The man begged for his life, but Eren took a knife and stabbed him in the throat before turning around again. Without a word, Eren hung up the phone.

Yoshida let go of Ai's hair, causing her to fall to her knees at the experience. Ruby ran up and hugged her mother. Ai instinctively put her arms around her daughter to shield her, the tears now streaming down her face as she held her daughter, unsure of what was going to happen. Ruby began to sob as well.

However, Ai glanced at Yoshida's face. He looked down at them, the helpless pregnant mother and her daughter, and really considered killing them. Ai could see it on his face, he seemed almost ready to kill them.

However, there was an indecision in his face. That uncanny feeling he had when he talked to Eren last time was replaced with fear. He didn't know if he should kill her, because then what Eren said would be true. He would have no way to bargain, and clearly, Eren was too much of a threat to not have some kind of leverage on.

" We'll get you on a boat tonight as planned. You're going overseas to your new life, and I'll deal with Eren then. " He said.

The boss walked out of the room, leaving Ai and Ruby to sob together at their near-death experience.

The doubt Ai had was slowly being replaced. Eren was terrifying... just as terrifying as when he killed Ryosuke. But it was never directed at her. This terrifying monster that Eren was only showed itself when she was in danger.

The logical part of her mind told her that he was a monster and warned her of danger. But the louder part of her mind told her he was only this way when he protected her.

She remembered all the times he smiled and had fun with her. How he was nice and kind and knew that was the real Eren. This Eren was only around when those he cared for were in danger. It scared Ai but made her feel protected.

She wished he was here now. Wished that she was in his arms again. Wished that she was safe with him.

She realized now that she wanted to be with him, and when he did save her, she'd do whatever she could to be with him.

"It's a risk you know, he might kill them out of rage." Sergei said as Eren hung up the phone.

"He's too scared now." Eren said. "He's still planning to deliver her tonight?" Eren asked.

"Da, he is." Sergei said.

"Then tonight is when I finish this." Eren said. "I'll hit him with a surprise he won't see coming."

"You mean the weird scuba grappling hook?" Sergei asked, pointing to his ODM gear. "I mean, I guess it makes sense since it'll be a cargo ship... but I have my doubts on the swords. Too brittle."

"They're supposed to be brittle, so they break when you slice large flesh at speed." Eren said.

"Large flesh... what you're fighting fat people?" Sergei asked, which made Eren chuckle. "These are Japanese, not Americans."

"We both know I don't understand that Sergei." Eren said. "Are Saitou, Miyako, and Meimei gone?"

"Da, they're going home now. Are you sure it's smart to let them leave?" Sergei asked.

"Whether they go to the police or not now is irrelevant." Eren said. "I have some preparations I need to make."

Knock, knock

Eren took out his pistol and so did Sergei, ready for a fight. Eren opened the door.

"Aqua?" Eren asked.

"There you are." He said, standing at the door with one hand on his hip since the other was in his sling.

"How the hell did he find us?" Sergei asked.

"I checked a few spots, but it clued me in when Miyako... who was talking about how she was going to take me in until Ai is found, didn't come back to the Shinomiya manor." Aqua said.

"So, you knew here?" Eren asked.

"After everything on the news about what you were doing, I figured you needed a base to get so many weapons. Wasn't hard to put that and Miyako's and Saitou disappearance together." Aqua explained.

"He's four..." Sergei looked at Eren but pointed at Aqua.

"I'm an old soul." Aqua said with a slight smirk.

"What do you want?" Eren asked, ignoring Sergei's disbelief.

"I want to help you save my mother and my sister." Aqua said.

This chapter I kind of experimented a bit with a montage of sorts lol. I debated about making each scene its own chapter but felt it would break the pacing and be too long. Plus, I kind of want to get to the end.

Let me know if that was a bad decision lol.

Eren has gone on a rampage, and he still hasn't used the ODM gear yet. Soon lol. Considering the emotional state Ai is in, I figured it would make sense that this is the moment she decides to be with Eren. Though... how is that possible after she's saved... is the big question lol.

Hope you guys enjoyed.

The Final Preparation

Chapter 45: The Final Preparation

"Seriously... he's four... how is he going to help?" Sergei asked after sitting down with Eren and Aqua.

"I'd have to agree with Sergei Aqua." Eren said. "Even if your arm was healed, you're still useless."

Aqua shrugged at that. He was fully aware that even if his arm was fully functional, he'd be useless in a fight. Even if he was an adult again, he never actually fought in his life, so he doesn't have the training or skill to go up against actual killers.

"Here's my question, how do you intend to save Ai and Ruby?" He asked.

"Do you think it's smart to tell him?" Sergei asked. "Kids aren't known for keeping secrets."

"He will Sergei." Eren said. "He's more mature than he looks."

"He doesn't look mature at all." Sergei said. "Again, he's four."

"I get it." Aqua said in annoyance. "So, what's the plan?"

"They're moving them to a boat over at a harbor south of Tokyo." Eren said. "I have a bunch of Ar-peegee's and explosives, so I can cause significant damage while staying more mobile than them. I can get in and out quickly before they can sell Ai to North Korea."

"See, a plan like that worries me." Aqua said. "You're talking about causing mass chaos and destruction with explosives, something that has little to no subtlety or control."

"I have no choice." Eren shrugged. "Yoshida will have a large number of armed guards and probably his best men. Even with all my skill, I'm still one man. I need to even the playing field as much as possible."

"And if Ai or Ruby gets killed in a stray explosion? What then?" Aqua asked. "You won't know exactly where they are. And if you sink the ship, they'll drown if you can't find them in time."

"I'm aware." Eren said.

"Then why go through with it?" Aqua asked, raising his voice.

"Because there isn't a better option." Eren said. "It's a risk, but we have one shot at this. If we fail, Ai and Ruby will be lost to us. I don't think I can attack an entire nation by myself this time" Aqua raised his eyebrow at that. "Especially since I can't blend in."

"So that's it?" Aqua asked. "You're gambling my family's life?"

"Yes." Eren said with no hesitation. "It's a gamble, but it's the best option we have."

"And if they die?" Aqua asked.

This caused Eren to pause. He knew there was a chance that either Ruby or Ai, even his unborn child, will die by his own hand from a stray explosion. But what other choice was there?

"I'd rather them dead than to live as slaves." Eren said.

"Really?" Aqua asked through narrowed eyes.

"The thought of Ai and Ruby... of my child... growing up trapped behind some forsaken walls... slaves to someone's will... is a horrible thought to me." Eren said. "The kind of isolation they experience in that country, the outside world may as well not exist. To imagine my child growing up, wondering what's beyond the prison my child grew up in, is a terrible thought."

"Does freedom mean that much to you?" Aqua asked.

"Yes." Eren said. "I won't let Ai live as a slave to another. I refuse."

"Then I'm the opposite, I can't imagine her or Ruby dying." Aqua said. "I'd rather them live, even if they are trapped in North Korea."

"Then what do you propose?" Eren asked.

"My young body and small size would actually allow me to easily sneak in." Aqua said. "Even if I'm caught, they'll know I'm Ai's son. They'll bring me directly to her. Then I can either break them out with my improvised lockpick set or tell you where they are, so you don't blow them up."

"Excellent idea." Eren said. "But how will you tell me?"

"Simple." Aqua said.

Aqua pulled out a small moveable phone that didn't have the normal mirror on it. Instead, it had a hinge that he was able to flip open and what looked like the keys of a typewriter.

"This is one of Ai's old phones." He said. "I got the plan activated and I can text you. Because it has physical keys, I can text while hiding it and know what I'm sending."

For demonstration, Aqua sent a message to Eren since he knew his phone number from Ai's actual phone, causing it to ring. Eren looked at his phone and sure enough, saw the message.

"Flawless plan, but there's one issue." Eren said.

"What?" Aqua asked.

"I still can't read."

... Fuck

"AH HAHHAHAHAHA!" Sergei fell out of his chair from laughing so hard at the conversation.

How the hell did Aqua forget about that!? All the work it took to reactivate this ancient phone and he forgot something so basic as that!?

"Haven't you been studying!?" Aqua yelled out.

"Since Ai left, no. Even then, I've barely been learning for a month. I can recognize some symbols, but not much." Eren said.

"That's Fucking Great!" Sergei yelled out as he got back in his chair. "The kid is a certified genius, came up with this great plan, and it failed because Eren is illiterate!" Sergei was still laughing loudly.

"Thank you, asshole." Aqua said to Sergei. "That's fine, you can simply push the read out loud option and it will read the text out to you."

"How do you do that?" Eren asked.

"Here." Aqua took Eren's phone.

Aqua showed Eren how to get texts to read out loud and they tested a few of it so that Eren would be able to at least comprehend what Aqua could text. It did make things harder for Aqua though, since he had to ensure the text was written perfectly or the computer might not say it correctly.

"While this is a great plan, I don't like the idea of putting a four-year-old at risk." Sergei said.

"Tough." Aqua said. "I'm doing this, no matter what."

Sergei looked at the boy and raised his eyebrow a bit. The kid seemed older than his age would suggest, Sergei wondered about him.

"You have a darkness in your eyes boy." Sergei said. "Almost looks familiar."

"How so?" Aqua asked.

"I've seen many men... men who were driven and dangerous. I'd say you have the same look that Eren does." Sergei noted.

"I don't care." Aqua said. "I'm not so frail. I did kill my father after all."

"Interesting." Sergei said. "I thought that police report was weird. Patricide at four, you got me beat by a few years."

"What?" Aqua asked.

"I killed my father when I was seven. Drunk bastard nearly killed me and my mother. I took his old Mosin from the war and did what I had to." Sergei shrugged, clearly over the event.

"That's rough." Aqua said, not sure what he should say.

"It's life. What about you Eren?" He asked.

"Ten." Eren shrugged.

Although it wasn't entirely the same, technically Eren did kill his own father when he became a pure titan and unknowingly ate him to gain the Attack Titan and Founder.

"Pretty sad, Da?" Sergei asked. "We're all a bunch of patricidal bastards."

"I didn't care about him." Aqua said. "All I care about is saving Ai and Ruby. That's it."

"So, we go with your plan." Eren said.

"I just need to get close, close enough for one of them to get me." Aqua said. "Then they should take me to Ai, though I'll need to lie

and say they kidnapped me."

"Why?" Eren asked.

"Could you imagine Ai's reaction if you agreed to have me part of the rescue plan. She'd actually probably kill you." Aqua said.

"Fair point." Eren said.

"Though not unreasonable... considering the kid is four." Sergei mentioned again.

"He's actually an adult that was reborn as an infant. Or he has the memories of an adult. One of the two." Eren said honestly.

"Seriously!?" Aqua yelled out at having his secret discovered.

"You really shouldn't play into a child's fantasies Eren." Sergei said.

Aqua glared at Eren, who gave a subtle smirk. No matter how many times you tell the truth, no one would believe. Aqua wondered if he revealed his situation to Sergei before, about being from another world, only for it to be laughed off.

"Let's get to it then." Eren said.

"We should give the boy a weapon though." Sergei suggested.

"Any ideas?" Aqua asked. "Most melee weapons are useless for me, and I've never used a gun before. I feel like it would be more dangerous to have it with no training."

"I have an old Spetsnaz ballistic knife." Sergei said as he pulled a relatively large dagger from his coat. "It's capable of firing the blade at the push of a button. Good for a child in this case."

"That easy?" Aqua asked.

"Well, some of the information about it is mostly propaganda. You need to be close. Any further than a few meters and it loses so much energy that it can't penetrate deep enough to hurt someone."

"Right." Aqua grabbed the knife.

Luckily, it was small enough to fit inside his sling, letting him conceal it easily so that he can pull it out. He doubted the guards would search him, given the fact that he's four. So Aqua felt like his chances were good.

With that, they loaded up the last of the equipment into the van and got ready to head out.

"It's ok Ruby-Chan." Ai said while she held her daughter.

Both of the pregnant mother and daughter were trapped in the ship that was going to take them to their new lives. The space was small, probably an old bedroom that only had a single cot that was fixed to the wall and a simple open toilet. It made Ai think of a jail cell, with a cage type door that was locked.

"What's going to happen to us mama?" Ruby asked.

"Now now." Ai said, hoping to keep Ruby from being scared.

Ai was on her knees with Ruby safely in her lap. She held her daughter and made sure that she was as loved and comforted as possible since they were both in danger.

"Mama is here, and no matter what, I will protect you." She smiled.

"What about papa?" Ruby asked.

"Well, mama can protect you too." Ai smiled. "But papa will get us out. Don't you worry."

Ai truly began to believe that. Based on how Yoshida reacted, Eren was a literal force of nature. Ai knew he was skilled and had killed before. But this was something that was almost otherworldly.

How can the most powerful Yakuza boss in the Kanto Region be so scared of a single man? Just how skilled of a fighter was Eren.

Skilled, and possibly sadistic. That man she saw in the FaceTime... his fingers were cut off and he begged for his life as Eren killed him. She thought that she should feel repulsed at watching Eren do something like that, but instead she felt even more safe.

Yes, it was a horrible thing to witness. But Eren did it to save her and Ruby. She doubted Eren would enjoy torturing someone. He didn't seem like that kind of person. He was kind, sweet, and a good person. He only got like this when she was in danger, and although she hated to see him like that, she knew it was for a good reason.

"Papa is strong." Ruby said as she huddled closer to her mother.

"Yes, he sure is." Ai said.

"Is this what having a good papa is like?" Ruby asked.

Ai felt her heart break again. Her daughter didn't have a good papa in her life. She grew up the first four years without one, just like how Ai grew up without a father. And when she finally did meet him, her father nearly killed her brother.

However, Ruby wasn't talking about Hikaru. She remembered her old life. Her old father and mother abandoned her in the hospital. All they had to do was visit... at least until she perished. They didn't, not once.

Eren though, he's fighting the entire Yakuza to protect them. That must be what a good father would do. Sacrifice everything to protect and save the people you care for.

"I would like to think so, but I don't know. He's not my papa." Ai smiled again.

"No, but he's your boyfriend. I think it's just as good." Ruby smiled.

"Yup." Ai laughed at her daughter.

Ruby and Ai jumped as they heard the door opening. Ai scooted back towards the wall, terrified of who it could be. She knew that at any time, Yoshida could change his mind and be rid of them.

She imagined the horror of her daughter being grabbed by the ankles and slammed into a wall till she died, or what would happen to her if she was left defenseless to Yoshida's men. The threats he said to Eren were heavy on her mind.

Instead, there was a yellow blur that flew into the cell before the cage door closed again.

"Aqua!" Ai yelled as she rushed over to him.

"Mama." He said quietly.

"Oh my... what happened!?"

"T-they took me mama." He said as he ran up to Ai and Ruby, holding them.

"No... no no no." Ai repeated.

At least one of her children would be safe... at least she hoped. But now, Aqua was destined for the same cursed fate as them. She shuttered to imagine North Korean Soldiers hurting her baby boy, especially since he still had bandages on after he was attacked by her bastard of an ex.

"Aqua..." Ruby said quietly, just as upset that her brother was here and in danger.

"I'm glad you're ok mama." He said.

"That's not important." She shook her head. "I didn't want them to take you."

She had to think of something. All three of her children were about to live a terrible life, trapped in a foreign country. She needed to find a way to save them. Maybe... maybe she could convince Yoshida to at least let her children go. She'd use her body if need be, but she needed some way to save them.

"Itai-" Aqua quietly as he reached into his sling.

"Are you ok?" Ai asked.

"Y-yea... just a bit in pain." He said.

While he was in pain, he started sending the message to Eren.

Stern of ship SEND. Port SEND. Third deck from the main SEND

Hopefully Eren would be able to avoid most of the chaos around the stern when he attacked.

"It's ok baby." Ai went back into motherly mode as she held both her children. "Mama's here, everything will be ok."

"I know." He said, squirming out of Ai's grasp.

He walked up to the door, making Ai confused.

The cage door luckily had a simple tumbler lock system. All he had to do was use his lockpick set and he should be able to escape.

He reached into his sling and took out the bent bar he had and the bobby pin. It was hard, but he managed to use both hands by awkwardly positioning himself. His slung was mostly useless, but his fingers and hand could move well enough, though with some effort and pain.

"Aqua-Chan...?" Ai said carefully.

"Got it!" He said in excitement.

The cage door swung open as the lock opened.

"Y... you..." Ai was amazed.

When did he learn to pick a lock? Should she be happy her baby boy is so smart or worried that he could be a delinquent one day and steal things.

"Come on mama." He motioned for her to come.

"We can escape!" Ruby exclaimed happily, though kept it at a whisper.

No time to ponder anything. Ai ran over and picked Aqua up. She made sure Ruby was on her back and Aqua was on her front. One hand reached behind her and supported Ruby's rear, so she'd stay on her back and the other hand held Aqua much the same way.

Ai knew that they needed to escape, and quick. The guard who delivered Aqua might be nearby, so she needed to escape with her children.

"We can escape. Once we see a police officer, we'll be safe." Ai said.

She had no time to question things about Aqua. She could do that later. Right now, they needed to escape.

"Hey!" A voice shouted.

Ai's heart quickened as the guard spotted them. She didn't think, only reacted.

She sprinted away from the guard, hoping, praying that she was fast enough. She was an idol after all, all that dancing had to make her fast.

However, carrying two toddlers slowed her down too much, and she felt her head get yanked back as the guard reached her and pulled her hair.

"Itai!" Ai screamed, falling backwards as Ruby and Aqua fell away from her.

Aqua reacted quickly. He drew a knife from his sling and rushed at the man, stabbing him in the leg. The man screamed, let go of Ai, and fell to his knees.

Aqua made to stab his neck but the man was too fast and reacted to it. He grabbed Aqua's wrist and held it back. Aqua smirked, glad that Sergei gave him this weapon.

He pressed the button and the ballistic knife shot out and stabbed the man in the neck. It grazed his neck, but it left a deep gash in the side that severed an artery. The man would be unresponsive in seconds.

With a whimper, he passed out at Aqua's feet, blood leaking from the wound as his life faded away.

Aqua turned to his mother and sister, both looking at him in shock and fear.

Ai was horrified at what her son just did. He killed a man, killed him in cold blood. A four-year-old, used a knife that she had no idea where he got it from, and killed a man with no hesitation.

Not only was he four, but he was her son. It broke her heart to see Aqua forced to defend himself like that, especially after all the times that he was the one attacked and hurt. She vaguely began to worry about his mental health but was also preoccupied in escaping.

Ruby was also horrified. She never saw so much blood before. Even when Ryosuke attacked, her head was buried in her mother's back,

unable to see what Eren did exactly. She stared, wide eyed at her brother, horrified that he was capable of killing.

Though, at least Ruby knew he was technically an adult, maybe not all that different from Eren.

"Shit, the kid killed someone!" Another guard shouted.

Aqua turned to try to do something but was too late. Even if he could react, he was defenseless.

The guard ran up and kicked him, almost like kicking a football. Aqua flew back and had the wind taken out of his lungs, barely able to breathe.

"Stop!" Ai screamed.

As two men surrounded Aqua to beat him, Ai picked up a pipe on the ground and ran over to protect her child. The guard with his back to her didn't see her. Although Ai was weak, a metal pipe being swung at an unsuspecting person's head was more than enough to knock them out.

"You bitch!" Another guard screamed.

Ai swung at him as well, but he reached out and grabbed the pipe and wrestled it out of her hand. He then backhanded her in the face, causing her eyes to explode in colors and dots as she slipped to the ground.

"Ai!" Aqua yelled out, though mostly paralyzed from the beating he took.

"Mama!" Ruby yelled.

The guard grabbed her by the hair, while another two grabbed the injured Aqua and the terrified Ruby. Ai was conscious, but in a lot of pain. She couldn't fight back as the guard dragged her down the hall by her hair.

Ai screamed and tried to get free, but she was too weak to open the man's grip from her hair. Her short height and lack of weight made it impossible to fight back.

"Please!" She screamed to the man. "Please let my children go!"

She was ignored.

"Let's take them to Oyabun. We can't keep her down her-"

boom

An explosion echoed in the distance, maybe towards the front of the ship.

"What the hell was that?" A guard asked.

"Let's get them there, quick." The guard said as they dragged the family towards Yoshida.

A few Minutes Ago

"We're pretty high up Eren." Sergei said.

"It'll be a good jumping off point." Eren said.

"For your repelling stuff?" Sergei asked.

"Sure." Eren said.

Eren was on top of a crane from a construction area, a little way away from the ship that was in the harbor. It was a short trip by ODM, but Eren needed to ensure he took Yoshida by surprise.

The dark night was contrasted with the bright lights from the building and traffic in the streets. The noise of the city was muffled with how high they were. Eren adjusted the straps on his body and made sure his blades were firmly seated in their sheaths.

Eren realized that it's been a while since he used ODM gear, not since before he left the Scouts while they were in Marley. Since then, he hadn't had the chance to use ODM gear again, so he may be a bit rusty. But he knew it would be easy to get used to it again.

"So, you go in, save the girl, then escape. Right?" Sergei asked.

"That's the plan." Eren said, adjusting the four Ar-Peegee's on his back and the pistol holster on his side, carrying his Marleyan pistol.

"Then what?" Sergei asked. "Live together happily with Ai? A fugitive from the law?"

"No." Eren said. "Ai is too important to me to live like a wanted criminal."

"You could always "kidnap" her." Sergei brought his hands to do quotes.

"No." Eren shook his head. "She deserves a good life. So, once I save her, I won't be able to be with her."

"So, I should have the boat ready?" Sergei asked.

Eren took a deep breath, standing on the edge of the crane, letting the cold wind cut him to the bone. He felt a shiver as it ran over his slacks and black turtleneck.

"After I save her, I'm turning myself in." Eren said.

"What?" Sergei asked. "Why? Are you crazy?"

"Ai was kidnapped because I went too deep Sergei." Eren said. "She was taken because she was used to manipulate me. For so long I've been running from my consequences. Not giving a damn about what happens after my choices."

Eren reflected on the advice Sergei gave him. How Sergei told him that this would be the result if Eren acted rashly or without thinking.

"So, you're going to let yourself be taken?" Sergei asked.

"Ai is a currency in this. Her and the children." Eren said. "As long as I'm free, her and the children will be used against me."

"After that speech of wanting freedom above all else... you're going to give it up?" Sergei asked.

"For my child... yes." Eren said, looking down. "I burned the world to the ground to save the people I care about. I marched knowingly to my own death, trapped in a fate of my own making. If I have to do that again for Ai and the children to be safe and free... so be it."

Sergei looked down, sad to see that Eren made up his mind and that Eren would undoubtedly suffer the same fate he did with his own love. Unfortunately, Eren chose this path and had to face the consequences of his actions.

"I promise you; I'll take care of them." Sergei said. "I'll make sure whoever takes Yoshida's place will leave them alone."

"I've been meaning to ask about that Sergei." Eren said.

"What?" Sergei asked.

"You've been manipulating everything... haven't you?" Eren asked, turning towards Sergei.

Sergei raised his eyebrow, more as a surprise than an actual question. For a moment, he said nothing, but then looked down and sighed.

"How did you come to that conclusion?" Sergei asked.

"I first grew suspicious when you easily found Kaguya." Eren said. "Yoshida may work closely with you, but I doubt he'd actually tell you where she was. I doubt anyone would have told you where she was. But, you have a lot of resources, so I let it go at the time."

"True, there's a lot of resources I have." Sergei said.

"But then, you knew exactly where Ai was being taken. Even knew where Yoshida's Commanders were and when and where the Yakuza bosses would be in their trip to Yoshida's meeting." Eren deduced.

"I do have resources." Sergei said.

"You knew everything about Yoshida's operation. I'd even guess that you knew about Mao's as well. Both gangs had a rat... but looking back, I think the rat was the same person... you." Eren stared right at Sergei.

"I may have fed information to both sides... Da." Sergei admitted.

"The shooter at the concert... what do you people call it... a sniper? He belonged to you." Eren said.

"He was me." Sergei said. "I couldn't have you and Mao killing each other at that time." Sergei admitted.

"So that's it then... you manipulated everything from the beginning." Eren said. "Why?"

Sergei walked over until he was standing next to Eren on the edge, looking out over towards the bay. Eren stared at Sergei, but Sergei was thinking, deciding how to tell Eren the truth.

"Was it to increase weapons sales or something?" Eren asked.

"No, though that was a bonus." Sergei shrugged; his voice serious but soft.

"Then what?" Eren asked.

"I'm a simple man Eren." Sergei said. "I grew up poor outside of Vladivostok. My father was an angry drunk that beat me every time he had nightmares of the Great Patriotic War. Or his time in a

Siberian work camp before he was conscripted. I grew up hungry and ate off of the scraps my father missed at the dinner table."

"When I became a man and joined the Red Army, I still lived poor. I got into this life because a long time ago, I chose my standard of living over the lives and happiness of others. Just like you did when you first got here, though I stamped out my sympathy years ago."

"The truth is Eren, I did it because I was paid very well to do it. And it did help weapons sales."

"Who paid you?" Eren asked.

"The Chinese Communist Party." Sergei said. "They have a desire to spy on Japan, but the Japanese government is too robust for that. So, they want to control the criminal element in order to ensure that they have a way to conduct espionage."

"So, the gang war was a convenient way to kill Yakuza members that are not sympathetic to the Chinese." Eren said.

"A Chinese agent could never directly control a Yakuza group." Sergei said. "Japan and China hate each other. A Yakuza member would never listen to a foreigners order."

"So, you instill a puppet leadership that is sympathetic." Eren concluded.

"Exactly." Sergei said. "Which is why I know everything. Every phone Yoshida had was tapped by Chinese spies I smuggled into Tokyo. They relayed information to me, and I used my connections to ensure the information got where I wanted. Mao knew this and wanted to kill me." Sergei chuckled to himself. "Though, the Chinese weapons they bought were from fake connections that I have, so I still profited."

"Is that why you recruited me?" Eren asked.

"At first? No. Back then, I just needed an extra hand to move boxes. I actually didn't factor you into my plans until that warehouse job. You don't let talent like that go to waste." Sergei explained.

"Yet you did everything you could to convince me to leave." Eren said.

"I needed to test your conviction. No use to use you if you quit halfway." Sergei explained. "Better to have you walk away early then to waste resources on someone with no conviction."

"Is that the only reason?" Eren asked, not fully buying it.

"Truth is." Sergei sighed as he looked down in sorrow. "I didn't want you to get involved. I'd rather have had you do small jobs and live a good life with the single mom. But, if you were going to be stupid, might as well use you." Sergei shrugged. "I'll be honest, I never would have helped you save Kaguya if it didn't result in Yoshida taking action against you. I need him eliminated."

"Last question." Eren said. "Is Ai in Yoshida's hands because of you?"

Sergei remained quiet for a moment, but only a small moment.

"I did need to speak to her, regarding your relationship. For no other reason than to give you closure." Sergei said. "Though, I'd be lying if I said I didn't drop her off in a spot that I knew Yoshida would act to take her."

Eren looked away from Sergei.

For a moment, there was a tense atmosphere that enveloped both me. Sergei reached into his coat, ready to pull a gun if he needed to. Eren loved Ai, he loved her very much. Sergei knew he was unpredictable when it came to her safety. There was a chance he would retaliate against Sergei.

"I won't attack you Sergei." Eren said with a sigh.

"Oh?" Sergei asked.

"What right do I have to attack you for manipulating me?" Eren asked. "I've been manipulating my best friends... the woman I loved... for four years. Chasing a future that I knew would burn the world. Hurting the people I love to reach my goal. Why would I attack you for doing the same?"

"Interesting way to look at it." Sergei said.

"Perhaps." Eren said. "But please... when this is over-"

"I'll make sure the new leadership stays away." Sergei said. "I promise."

Sergei relaxed as another silence fell over both men. Eren looking down towards the ground, his eyes full of sadness and exhaustion.

Eren took out his phone as it vibrated, opening the text from Aqua and putting it in voice mode.

"Stern of ship. Port. Third deck from the main."

"What's a stern and main in this context?" Eren asked.

"You don't know nautical terms?" Sergei asked.

"I've only been on a boat once." Eren said.

"Stern is the rear of the ship, three decks below the main means that they're on the third floor beneath the main deck. The main floor on the top of the ship." Sergei explained.

"So, I'll focus most of my firepower on the front of the ship." Eren said.

"That's the bow." Sergei said.

"And Port?" Eren asked.

"It means left." Sergei said. "The Starboard is the right of the ship. Easy way to remember is port and left both have four letters."

"Right." Eren said.

"Oh yea, illiterate. Sorry." He said.

"So back left, three floors down. Understood." Eren said, pocketing his phone and taking the handles from under his arms.

"This may be the last time I see you kid." Sergei said. "I know you have a grim fate after you save her, but I do hope you find peace in whatever decision you make."

"Thank you, Sergei." Eren said with a small smile.

Perhaps it was weird to think, but Sergei reminded him a lot of Levi. Someone who cared for him and someone Eren saw as a mentor. Levi was a hard man, but he cared deeply for his subordinates. Sergei was different in many ways, but Eren knew Sergei did care in his own way.

"Good luck kid." Sergei said.

Eren smiled warmly, but knew it was time to part ways. Eren took in a deep breath, before jumping off the crane. The familiar feeling of free falling hit him, his instincts in using ODM gear were not rusty at all. It felt familiar, like walking after waking up in the morning. Slightly hesitant in his movements, but that quickly went away.

Eren shot a line forward, the gas helping to launch the grapple to the nearest building and the thrust propelling him forward.

"EREN!" Sergei screamed as Eren jumped.

He didn't see Eren connect the line to anything, he just jumped with no safety. He was going to die, and Sergei couldn't help him.

"What the fuck..." Sergei said as he saw Eren rocket forward, following a line connected to his hip.

How was... what was... he can't just...

"There's no way he's from another world." Sergei said to himself.
"There's no possible way."

Sergei checked his pockets. No alcohol or drugs... this was real.

"It can't be." Sergei walked back towards the ladder on the crane, pondering what he just saw.

Sorry for the delay. Work was a pain lol.

So, finally we got ODM in action lol.

So interesting test. Similar to Yoshida learning that Eren saved Kaguya, I didn't want to overtly show that Sergei was the mastermind. I wanted it to be subtle, something that Eren puts together after seeing multiple weird instances from Sergei.

How does Sergei know so much? Why does he seem like he knows everything? It's less of having a scene showing Sergei do something suspicious, and more so the characters connecting the dots over time. So, when you go back and reread it, you think "Oh, that makes sense. How did he find Kaguya so easily?" Or "How did he know so much about Yoshida's operations?"

That's the thing, instead of a big reveal or someone telling the characters a revelation, they work it out themselves. One event isn't too suspicious, but multiple events are.

At the same time, I didn't want to make Sergei an antagonist to Eren. I wanted him to manipulate things but also be the one to help and mentor Eren. Even way back in chapter 2, you see him transporting

Chinese spies. You don't think anything of it until the truth is revealed.

I hope it worked. If not, please let me know.

Hope you guys enjoyed.

The Final Battle

Chapter 46: The Final Battle

The air rushed by Eren, the familiar feeling of zooming through the sky was a fun yet terrifying experience. No matter how many times he trained or fought in ODM gear, Eren always had that adrenaline associated with freefalling.

Eren had to use more gas than he intended. The brightly lit buildings were much further and more spread out than the buildings in Paradis. The gas propelling the lines forward had to be on for longer in order to reach them.

For a moment, Eren felt the line go slack and began to freefall. The buildings were primarily made of glass so he'd have to re-anchor the ODM gear occasionally since it would fail to stay connected to the glass. It was a difficult thing to do at first, but he quickly adapted.

Eren flew past another construction crane, angling himself so he flew forward feet first. He tucked his legs together and his arms in front of him so he could go through the gaps in the structural pipes, mostly just to save gas instead of going around.

Eren had ten minutes of gas to play with, but that's only if he was conservative with it. He remembered Jean's advice on using his momentum while he moved. The idea was that you use less gas by pulling yourself with the line than using the thruster to go up. By utilizing this, you can maintain your height and gain more momentum, which reduces the gas used.

It was difficult to master, Jean was arguably the best at this, a true genius in the use of ODM. Even Captain Levi and Mikasa, with their Akerman blood, still couldn't use ODM the way Jean did. If anything, their unique fighting style burned through gas quick.

When Eren got close to the ship, he started to try and identify Yoshida's men. He was quick to discover them, they all were patrolling the ship with those portable electric lights and looking for anyone to sneak on board. They were expecting him.

However, they were looking for him to sneak on board. They never expected Eren to attack from the sky.

He identified his first target. A man at the very front of the ship who was looking over it towards the dock. He was vigilant, and prepared for Eren, his Aykem at the ready in case Eren showed up. Eren smirked to himself, knowing he'd be easy to kill.

There were other guards behind him, also looking around. They will probably see Eren attack him, but they won't be able to react in time.

Eren drew both of his swords as he descended, the anchors were loose, and he began to freefall to the deck of the ship. He used some gas to slow his descent, enough for him to land without breaking or spraining his ankle.

With a swipe from both swords, the man was nearly cleaved in half. His body hitting the ground from the impact at the same time that Eren hit the deck. Eren slid forward a few feet, his incredibly sharp blades easily cut through with only the tips breaking so he didn't get stuck while going so fast.

Predictably, the others saw and didn't react. They were so surprised at how sudden Eren attacked that they couldn't move. They stood there as Eren slowed to a halt.

As fast as he arrived, Eren shot a line up towards a loading crane and propelled himself away, giving them no time to react.

Using the momentum he gained, he took a page out of Captain Levi's book. He flew around the group of three, each of them struggling to keep up with Eren's speed as his silhouette melted into the brightness of the surrounding buildings.

Eren anchored in the center of all three men who were next to each other and flew between them. He angled the gas to his left, causing him to spin to the right. He extended his arms and let the swords spin and cut the three men down. While he wasn't as good as the Akerman's, it served its purpose well enough.

Men on the upper structure of the ship took notice and were finally able to react. They started yelling what Eren assumed were orders and prepared their weapons to shoot Eren. Eren didn't give them the time.

Eren put the ODM handles away and took out one of his Ar-Peegee's. He took it in a reverse grip and fired it at the upper structure of the ship, right around where the wheel was.

With a massive explosion, the men were disoriented, and the ship was disabled. Regardless of what happened now, the combination of the ship being disabled, and the explosion would ensure the police arrive and save Ai, even if Eren died in the attempt.

Eren threw the spent tube away and got out his ODM controls again, using the shock of the men to propel himself directly at the remaining men on the upper structure.

Eren drew his swords again and flew right into the center of the gathering group, who were still shaking their heads in order to stop the ringing from the explosion. They had no chance as Eren started to cut them all down.

Eren started swiping at them, treating each man as if he was the weak spot of a Titan. The men screamed in agony as the sharp blades easily cut through them.

One man tried to shoot him, but Eren used the thruster to jump over him and land behind him. With a thruster assisted spin, Eren decapitated the man before he could turn around.

Another man shot at Eren, but his aim was off. Eren shot a line forward and imbedded itself into the man's chest and reeled him in. Eren trusted his swords forward, now the size of knives as they were widdled down to nubs, and dethatched them while they were inside the man he reeled in.

Eren released the line and pulled out another set, intending to kill more men before they could properly react.

A few fired widely at Eren, trying desperately to hit him, but with Eren's enhanced agility, he was able to move out of the way, causing their bullets to cross each other and making them hit their comrades.

Eren threw some explosives into the wheelhouse, ensuring there was no way it could be used. Once he did, he jumped over the edge and used some gas to fly higher up and over the upper structure.

He took out a remote and pressed the button, causing the room to explode.

Eren wasn't done yet, he had more men to kill. He quickly switched to his Ar-Peegee while in the air and punched it forward, firing a round into a group of men who were exiting one of the doors leading into the ship. They were close enough together that the molten copper turned them into a pile of limbs and burnt flesh.

Eren checked his remaining gas... he had only one last good use before he ran out. The trip here burned more gas than intended and the fighting caused him to get a bit more liberal with his gas. He had to bring the fight to the ground and start going into the ship.

Eren used the upper structure to latch onto and propel himself to the rear of the ship and up into the air. He heard his phone ring with a text from Aqua.

While in the air, he took his phone out and hit the read out loud button as he fell, putting it up to his ear in order to hear it over the rushing wind.

" Taken forward to the Bow. Same floor. Maybe center of ship, in Yoshida's room. "

Eren closed the phone. It was time to go inside and deal with Yoshida.

Eren used the last of his fast to propel himself to one of the doors in the center of the ship. One unfortunate man took that time to come out of the ship but was impaled by Eren's swords as he used the momentum to fling them into the ship, killing him instantly.

" Damn it all. " Yoshida said in annoyance.

The small family was brought into his personal room, which wasn't as decorated as his other areas since it was a quick makeshift decision for him to personally see this transfer. It was little more than a small cargo room with some of his furniture and tables for his comfort.

However, right now it was used as a way to barricade himself from Eren.

Ai sat in the center of the room on a carpet, right near Yoshida's chair as he watched the camera monitors as Eren came onto the ship. Ai was on her knees and held her children in her arms, terrified of the Yakuza boss.

Aqua was slightly limp, grunting every so often from the beating he took. His nose was bleeding, and he was already starting to bruise again. Ai was so terrified at having her son hurt again but she couldn't do anything to protect him.

However, Eren could deal with them.

Ai looked at the camera monitors in complete shock. She could see the complete fear and uneasy look on Yoshida's face as Eren literally FLEW around with swords like some kind of weird magical samurai.

The film was grainy, and they only caught glimpses of Eren as he flew, but it was clear that he was completely massacring Yoshida's men.

The kind of precision and speed he displayed look uncanny, as if no one should be able to move with such speed. No one could react in time to stop Eren and they quickly died when he closed distance.

" What the hell am I fighting? " Yoshida asked himself. " What the actual hell is he? "

" P-please. " Ai tried to say. " J-just let us go and Eren will stop. "

Ai hoped he would listen. Ai knew nothing of ships, but even she knew that if the bridge was destroyed, the ship was useless. There was no way they were leaving Japan. If Yoshida let them go, maybe Ai could convince Eren to walk away, and it would prevent more death.

However, it had the opposite effect. Yoshida got made as he turned his gaze on Ai, glaring at her as if she was Eren. Ai held her children close to her as he walked towards them, his breathing ragged from rage.

" Don't you dare think I am the weak one in this! " He yelled at Ai, causing her to yelp and look away, tightening her hold on her children.

Yoshida grabbed Ai's hair, causing her to scream and pulled her away. She let go of Aqua in the surprise, but Ruby held onto her, getting dragged away just like her mother. Ai pleaded with Yoshida, but it did nothing.

" I figured a punishment with just selling you would be enough, but now I see I need to be more drastic! " He yelled. " I don't need the three of you to bargain, so he's about to see how serious I am! "

" Please stop! " Ai yelled as Ruby was ripped out of her arms.

Yoshida threw Ruby to the ground away from Ai. Yoshida took out a revolver and cocked the hammer back, ready to shoot her daughter.

" *Mama!* " Ruby yelled, terrified at dying again.

" *Please stop! Not my daughter!* " Ai tried to move, but she couldn't do anything.

The entire time, Aqua could hear what was going on. He barely got out a text to Eren, letting him know the change in locations. He felt too weak to move. His injuries from not only that Yakuza boss from the attack on the show, but Hikaru as well, were reopened and causing so much pain.

However, Ruby was in danger. He didn't care if she technically wasn't his sister, she was family and he loved her just as much as Ai. But he was too weak to fight.

Even as Goro, Aqua was still weak. He died because some idiot fan with a knife killed him. Goro couldn't even fight back properly. Even as Aqua, he could do nothing every time that Ai was in danger.

But he thought back to Eren's words, that day he was in the hospital. How Eren said it didn't matter who he was. Was he Goro, Aqua, or both? Who cared. Just because Goro died, doesn't mean Aqua can't fight.

So, in that moment, Aqua decided who he was. He stood against one Yakuza boss to save Ai, killed his own father, and snuck onto a ship full of criminals to protect his family. That's who he wants to be.

So... get up.

Move damn it.

To hell with his battered body... he needed to get up.

He needed to fight.

Fight.

" *Tatakae* ." Aqua whispered out loud.

" *Tatakae* ."

" *Tatakae* ."

Aqua grabbed a baseball that was on the ground near him, probably one of Yoshida's personal ones. It even had a signature from some player Aqua didn't recognize.

Aqua used his good arm and threw it at Yoshida's head as hard as he could, hoping to do some damage. Hoping that he could maybe knock him out and buy Eren time to arrive.

" Ow. " Yoshida said in minor annoyance as a baseball hit him in the side of his head.

He was about to shoot Ruby when the baseball hit him, making him rub the area it hit, and he knew it would give him a bump.

" *Damn this four-year-old body...* " Aqua said to himself. No matter how determined he was, he was still four.

" *Brave little man wants to save his sister, right?* " Yoshida glared at Aqua.

Ai rushed at Yoshida, hoping to physically stop him from hurting either of her children. His shock was enough for her to react; however, Yoshida easily overpowered her and threw her to the ground.

Aqua reacted by grabbing a nearby object, which was a small pocketknife. He held it out in front of him, ready for a fight. He didn't need to win, just buy Eren time.

" *Fine, little man wants to be a sacrifice, let's see what you have.* " Yoshida laughed.

Aqua knew he was enjoying this. He was going to kill one of the kids to punish Eren, all logic was gone.

Aqua took the initiative, charging at Yoshida to hopefully surprise him. Yoshida reacted by stepping away and kicking Aqua in his slung arm.

Aqua yelled in pain as that happened, knowing that his injury was probably getting worse. Why do they always aim for that? They know he can't fight, so why hit his weak spot? Yoshida was just as much of a damned sadist as Hikaru.

Aqua slashed at Yoshida's legs, the only part of him that he could reach. Yoshida laughed as he stepped away, easily able to dodge the weak and slow attacks of an angry four-year old.

Ai watched in shock as her son tried desperately to fight. She felt like a failure, unable to protect her son and being forced to watch him defend her and Ruby. Why did he never understand that it was her job?

She had to fight. She had to protect both of them. She loved them both too much to let either of them die. Even if it cost her life, she would fight for her children.

Ai ran up to Yoshida and grabbed a nearby lamp, trying to hit him. Yoshida saw her and kicked Aqua down before turning to her and blocking her weak attack.

He reached out and slapped her in the face, hard, causing Ai to fall again. However, Ai reached out and grabbed his legs, trying desperately to hold him so he would focus on her and not her children.

Yoshida easily freed himself and grabbed her by the hair and lifted her up.

" So, the mother wants to die? No luck for you, I need you for bargai-
"

BOOM!

"Die." Eren said in a growl.

He stabbed the Yakuza guard multiple times with his sword, killing the man instantly.

The hallway was tight and hard to maneuver, but he was basically out of gas anyway, he had some, but not enough to actually maneuver.

He shot a line at one guard down the hallway, preventing him from drawing his gun, and pulled him over to Eren. Eren slashed with his sword and beheaded the man in one strike. His momentum carried him past Eren, who stepped out of the way as he flew past.

Eren lost his left blade since it was now too dull to fight with and took out his Marleyan pistol. He reacted quick and shot any guard in the hallway, taking care to identify his targets so as to not accidentally shoot Ai or the kids.

He pinned one guard to the wall and stabbed him in the lower abdomen, causing him to scream in pain.

"English!?" Eren yelled.

" *H-hai*. " The guard said.

"Yoshida, Where!?" Eren yelled.

"D-down there." He pointed to a stairwell.

Eren shot the guard in the face and made his way to the stairs. As he reached it, bullets flew up from below him, almost killing him. Eren took some grenades and pulled the pins, letting them drop

downstairs and exploding, killing the guards as they tried to walk up the stairs.

After a while, the guards started to run as they saw him, knowing that they had no chance. Eren was a force of nature and no number of threats or payments from Yoshida was worth fighting Eren.

Eren saw the door that was likely Yoshida's. He took out an Ar-Peegee and readied it to blow open the door. He made sure it was at an angle so it wouldn't kill the people inside.

With a thrust of his hand, he pulled the trigger and caused it to fire.

BOOM!

The door to the room blew open with a massive explosion. Thankfully, RPGs are shape charges, which means their force is directed forward and not in a sphere like most explosives. At the angle Eren shot, the force bypassed everyone in the room while also blowing a hole in the door.

Yoshida turned to the new hole, terrified as Eren stepped through.

He had a sword in his left hand, with the tip broken off, and a freshly loaded RPG in his other hand. He glared at Yoshida as he entered.

Eren was covered in blood, no doubt from the men he easily killed. His face was full of silent rage as he glared at Yoshida who had the woman he loved in his grip.

Aqua got slightly annoyed, that blast could have killed them. Eren really meant what he said in how much he was willing to gamble to save them.

"E-eren..." Yoshida said. "You're here." He switched to English.

Ruby and Aqua took this time to run over to Eren, hiding behind him for safety. He didn't move, only allowed them to take refuge behind him.

The only person who couldn't was Ai, who was held by her hair between Eren and Yoshida as a human shield. Eren wouldn't dare risk hurting her.

"Now Eren... let's talk. We can come to an arrangement." Yoshida tried to bargain.

With his plan ruined and only having Ai to bargain with, Yoshida resorted to hopefully appealing to Eren's mercy. As long as he had Ai, he was safe.

However, Eren was blocking his only exit. He didn't expect Eren to risk blowing a hole through the door.

"Clearly, you won, so there's no need to continue." Yoshida said. "But there is no reason for us to continue bloodshed. You've proven how strong you are, so I can release Ai and you can leave with her. I won't come after you, I promise."

Ai wondered why Eren was silent. But then she remembered what that Yakuza guy that Eren captured said.

"You're not important e-enough" The Yakuza guy said.

Eren still didn't give Yoshida the respect to even speak. Yoshida caught onto this but was not in a position of strength anymore. Eren's posture and silence said one thing.

It said, there will be no bargaining and you will release Ai.

"Fine, I'll let them go." Yoshida said, knowing that he was completely at Eren's mercy. "But I want your word that you will let me go. I promise I will never go after you or them again."

Eren remained silent.

"I-I'm letting her go." Yoshida said.

He released Ai's hair, causing her to sprint as fast as she could behind Eren. She fell to her knees and embraced her children, tears flowing from the experience.

They were safe.

"There, they're safe and free. Now let me go." Yoshida said.

Eren dropped the rocket launcher, implying that he would let Yoshida go.

"Go into the hallway and cover their eyes." Eren said to Ai.

Ai was on autopilot and did as she was told.

Once they were gone, Eren took out his Marleyan pistol, and before Yoshida could react, he shot him three times. Once in the head and twice in the chest, killing him instantly.

Eren had no intention of letting him live. Sergei needed Yoshida dead in order to replace him, which means that Sergei can ensure that no one would dare come after Ai. Even if Yoshida promised he'd stay away, Eren trusted Sergei more.

Now, it was time to escape.

Eren came into the hallway. Ai was covering her children's eyes and tried not to look at the ground that was covered in bodies. She noticed the weird contraption on Eren and chose to focus on that instead of the bodies.

"We'll go out this way, away from the bodies." Eren said as he sheathed his sword and got his gun ready.

Thankfully, no one was left to attack them as they reached the dock. Whoever was left decided that they didn't want to die to Eren and ran

off, especially as they heard sirens in the distance and police arriving on the scene. They waited and set up a perimeter so no one could escape.

" *Now what?* " Ai asked Eren as she held her children.

"I didn't understand that." Eren said.

"I mean, what happens now?" She asked.

It was a logical question. What was Eren's plan now? They knew they needed to talk, but Eren needed to escape as well. So, they had very little time to talk.

"I'm turning myself in." Eren said.

"What!?" Ai yelled out. "W-why?"

"You and your children were in danger because of me." Eren said. "If I'm out of the picture, you and they will be safe. As well as..." Eren looked down at her stomach.

So, he knew.

"B-but that's not right. You can't be taken in." Ai said.

"Ai." Eren tried to argue.

"I talked to your Russian friend, to Sergei." Ai said. "He told me to come to a decision about us. And I came to my decision. I don't want to give you up Eren. I know you were desperate, but I can't let you get arrested."

"There's no way we can be together. Not after what I've done." Eren said, thinking back to not only his time in Japan, but in his world as well. He didn't deserve a happy ending.

"We can run away!" Ai tried to say. "We can escape to a different country together. Sergei said he was going to smuggle you out, we

can go together."

Ai didn't know what she was saying. She was so emotional from the experience and felt like she was losing Eren now that he's back with her again.

"Ai, we can't do that to them." Eren said, motioning to the kids.

Eren knew Aqua was able to understand the conversation, while Ruby was confused. She could only see their emotions but couldn't follow the conversation since they spoke too quickly.

"Please Eren... I love you." Ai said as she started to cry.

She said it. Maybe it was the emotions speaking, or the fact that she was terrified of losing him again, but she said it.

"I know." Eren said as he got closer and gently hugged her and the kids, trying hard not to let the blood on him touch them.

Ai sobbed as he held her. Eren was a good man, but the legal system won't see it that way. He could even face the death penalty for what he did.

"I kept making mistakes, ever since I got to Japan." Eren said. "But I am so grateful to have met you. You made me very happy Ai; I am glad you forced me to spend time with you."

Ai giggled a bit at that.

"But I need to face the consequences of my actions. For so long I just kept moving forward without thinking of the consequences of my actions. It put you and the children in danger. So I have to face this. I have to let them take me. that way, no one will use you to force me to join them."

"Please, let's run away." Ai begged.

"And what? Let the kids live on the run? Robbed of the chance to go to school, something that's reserved for only a few people in my w-country." Eren caught himself. "They deserve their freedom."

"But what about you." Ai asked.

"I'll accept what happens to me and accept the consequences. For the first time in my life, I want to act with a clear and rational head." Eren said. "So please, don't cry. Live a long and happy life for me."

"I-I will." Ai said.

" *Papa?* " Ruby asked, still confused.

"Papa has to go to jail Ruby." Eren said.

" *No!* " Ruby yelled, able to understand that. " *No! No! No!* " She shook her head.

"I have to." Eren said.

Eren patted her head, causing Ruby to cry as she refused to accept Eren going to prison.

Eren shared a look with Aqua and nodded. Eren obviously knew that Aqua was an adult and there was a moment of respect shared between them. Eren knew Aqua fought hard to protect his family, and he was glad and felt like the family would be safe.

"I have to go Ai." Eren said.

Eren shared one last hug before he turned around. Ai walked with him as they approached the police blockade. Eren threw his weapons on the ground and raised his hands, showing his intention to surrender.

The police were quick and decisive in their arrest of Eren. They placed his hands behind his back and handcuffed him, before

moving him to a squad care. Ai and the children were taken away by paramedics, who treated her and told her that she was safe.

Predictably, they assumed that Ai was kidnapped by Eren and was released when Eren turned himself in. So, Ai and the children would only be questioned and likely released.

Eren was placed in a small room with what looked like a mirror on one side. His hands were cuffed in front of him and on the table that was in the center of the room. Eren sat on one chair and saw a chair on the other side of the room. No doubt he was about to be interrogated.

Eren expected this, though he was more comfortable. He expected to already be tortured. He wondered how Japan tortured criminals, did they use machines or simply cut fingers off like Marley or Paradis?

Suddenly, the door opened.

"Mr. Yeager, it's nice to meet you." A man in a suit walked in, carrying what looked like red cans.

Eren nodded as he walked in the door.

"I have some soda, I wanted to know if you wanted some?" He man asked.

Soda, he had that drink with Ai before. But why offer him a drink, was it some kind of drug like truth serum? Eren decided he would tell the truth, no matter how unbelievable it was. But he didn't feel like being high from a truth serum.

"No thank you." Eren said.

"Well, it's here if you want it." The man said. "My name is Detective Yanada, I was assigned to speak with you."

"Ok." Eren said.

"How are the handcuffs, they're not too uncomfortable, right?" He asked.

What was he playing at? Why would he care? This is an interrogation, yet this man was acting friendly.

"I will admit, that's some impressive agility you showed. It probably explains your physique. Do you work out often?" Yanada asked.

Detective Yanada was employing a classic trick to get Eren to talk. By talking about Eren and starting the conversation by offering him a drink and complimenting him, it should compel Eren to talk more, which would cause Eren to likely slip and mention something they could use in court.

What they wanted to avoid, was Eren to request a lawyer or to shut down, both options would cause the questioning to end. So far, Eren seemed cooperative.

"Sure." Eren shrugged.

Not much of a talker.

"We heard you're from a rural area, did you work out a lot in your home country?" Yanada asked.

"Yea, I was a Soldier." Eren said.

"What was the name of your Army?" Yanada asked.

"At first, we didn't really have an official name. Just either the Military or Soldiers of humanity since we believed the world was overrun by Titans." Eren said, causing Yanada to raise his eyebrow. "Though now, we're called the Eldian Military."

"Eldian, is that your country's name in your language?" Yanada asked.

"Yes." Eren said.

"Can you point it on a map?" Yanada asked.

"I can't." Eren said.

"Really, why not?"

"It's in another world." Eren said.

There was a pause as Yanada considered Eren's response. Another world?

"Like a reverse Isesaki?" He asked.

"I know that word." Eren said, resembling Aqua's explanation. "Yes, that's accurate."

"Well, why don't you tell me about your world." Yanada said.

Eren began to explain everything about the world he grew up in. How he grew up in the walls that protected them from the Titans, explained what Titans were, and that he joined the Military in order to fight them.

He went into detail about learning the truth of his world, how humanity thrived beyond the walls. Explained the shifters and how they worked, as well as his own powers. He went into detail about the war with the global alliance and the final battle of Shiganshina.

Eren knew he wouldn't be believed, but he wanted to tell the truth anyway.

Predictably, Yanada didn't believe him. He let Eren talk, for no other reason than to let Eren hopefully say something that would sound like a confession. However, he had no idea why Eren was lying like this.

Did he hope to plead insanity? If so, it wouldn't work. Insanity only works if you kill without emotion. Hearing demons or voices in your head or outlandish tales isn't what makes you insane. Even then, being diagnosed with insanity will not reduce your prison sentence.

But Eren kept talking, and Yanada listened.

"After I was shot in the head I... woke up in Japan." Eren said, not wanting to go into detail about the Rumbling.

Detective Yanada heard a lot of stories and excuses. This was new though. The most common one was voices or demons in the criminals head.

"Is that why you decided to join the Yakuza?" Yanada asked.

He played along, since it would hopefully get more evidence for Eren to incriminate himself.

"Well, I-"

" *Yanada, we need to cut this short.* " Another detective walked into the room.

" *Why?* " Yanada asked.

"We have a VIP who wants to speak to Yeager, so we need to let him." The man said.

" *He didn't request a lawyer.* " Yanada said.

" *We need to stop, just let's go.* " He said.

Eren was confused on what was said but watched as they walked out.

Eren assumed they were tired of his story and were probably just going to execute him. It would make sense, since no one would believe. Oh well, at least Ai and the children were safe.

His own child would grow up free and safe in a world that was comparatively much better than his own. Ruby no doubt would grow to become an idol just like her mother, Eren knew she had the drive to do it.

Aqua, he had no idea. But Aqua was a man, so he'd figure it out.

Eren did wonder how he would be executed. Did they do beheadings here or simply hang criminals? Would be broken on a wheel or skinned alive. Maybe even burned alive.

He didn't envy his position, but he experienced worse pain. At least this time, the mutilation will stick and actually let him die.

The door opened and an unfamiliar face walked in.

A bit shorter than I wanted it to be, but I hope you guys like it.

I was planning to end it with Eren just getting arrested, but I feel like this will add more tension and mystery. Maybe.

Hope you guys enjoyed, as always.

A Bucket of Salt

Chapter 47: A Bucket of Salt

Ai sat next to Aqua while he was in a hospital bed... again.

She was sad, again her son was beaten and injured and forced to go to the hospital for trying to fight and protect the family. First, he was hurt by Ryosuke, then that Yakuza guy at the concert, then Kamiki, and now this.

When will he just be safe?

Ruby was in her lap, cuddling her after the terrible experience. Luckily, the doctors confirmed that there was no damage to Aqua outside of minor bruising. His injured arm was slightly damaged, but he showed remarkable healing, which was attributed to his young age since children healed quickly.

At least he would be ok. Still, she was going to get both of her children therapy. Especially after her son was forced to kill a man.

The image of the dead Yakuza guard didn't leave her mind. Her sweet and innocent baby boy was forced to kill someone. She hated herself for failing to protect him.

"What's wrong mama?" Aqua asked.

Ai leaned over and hugged him, careful not to hurt him. She felt tears coming but held them back for her childrens sake.

"I'm so sorry you and Ruby had to experience that." Ai said.

"It's ok mama." Aqua said.

"No, it isn't. I am supposed to protect you." She said.

"Mama, you were kidnapped by armed thugs. Very few people could do anything against that." Aqua reasoned.

"Besides, that's papa's job." Ruby chimed in. "Right?"

Ai wished that was the case. Eren would likely get life in prison, possibly even executed for his crimes. It could take years, but if they decided, they might execute him.

Yet he did all that to protect her and the children.

"Hoshino-San." A nurse called into the room.

"Yes?" Ai responded.

"You have visitors." The nurse said.

Suddenly, the room was filled with not only B-Komachi, but the Student Council as well.

"Ai!" Meimei yelled as she ran over to embrace her friend.

"Meimei." Ai said as she hugged her back.

"Ai." Saitou said sadly.

"President." Ai said.

"Come on, I'm not your boss anymore." He walked over and hugged her as well, his voice soft and vulnerable. "Just call me Saitou-San." He said.

"Well, I've spent so long calling you President, so I don't think I could stop." She smiled, which made Saitou smile.

"How's the baby?" Miyako asked.

"Aqua is fine." Ai said.

"I mean the one in your womb." Miyako clarified. "I know you're still early, but it's dangerous after what happened."

"The doctors looked at him or her. The baby is fine for now. The pregnancy is so early that there was very little chance of an accident." Ai said.

"Thank goodness." Meimei sighed in relief.

The other girls of B-Komachi hugged Ai, Ruby, and Aqua as well, offering their sympathy and promising that they would help Ai and the kids.

"I'm glad you're ok Ai." Kaguya said as she approached.

"Yea, we were really worried." Fujiwara said.

"I'm fine now, we all are. Thanks to Eren." Ai said.

"The news is saying he failed in kidnapping you after a disagreement in the Yakuza." Meimei said. "Though, I know that's wrong."

"How do you know?" Ai asked.

"He threatened me into letting him use the studio as a base to operate out of while he rescued you." Saitou said. "He practically held us hostage."

"Even still, he did save Ai... spectacularly I might add." Meimei said.

"Seriously, are you guys seeing the CCTV footage. He's like freaking Spider-Man!" Nino yelled out.

"Yea." Fujiwara agreed. "He literally swung around and... well... most of the footage is censored. I'd like to believe he just knocked them out." She shuttered as she chose to live in her delusion.

Ai saw the aftermath. He did a lot more than that.

"I still can't say I like him." Saitou said. "But... for saving you, he at least has my respect."

"Not like it matters." Ishigami said. "Likely he'll get life in prison, if they don't decide to use the death penalty for this specific case."

"Ishigami, please keep your mouth shut." Kaguya sighed.

"Understood." He said, slightly scared of Kaguya.

"Although, about that." Kaguya began. "I am going to have one of my father's personal lawyers to help him. I don't think we could get him off, but with enough work, maybe we could get his sentence reduced to ten years."

"Could you talk to your father?" Meimei asked.

"What would he do?" Kaguya asked. "Not only does he probably believe that Eren was the one who kidnapped me, but he would never risk his reputation to help a criminal. I mean, I'm sorry, but there's no way I can convince him to help." Kaguya said.

"What if you told him Eren saved you?" Ai asked.

"Even then, why would he help Eren?" Kaguya asked. "It's not like her particularly cares. He's almost never around anyway." Kaguya crossed her arms in annoyance.

"I see your point." Ai said sadly.

"We'll work on it; I promise I'll hire the best lawyer to defend Eren."

"It's all we can hope for." Ai said.

Eren watched as an old and almost sickly man walked into the room. He had long white hair that was slicked back but still dressed in a nice black suit. The man balanced himself on a cane and slowly made his way to where Eren was cuffed.

In his hand was a cup full of a hot kind of liquid. Eren could smell it, and it reminded him of that black liquid that Zeke used to drink. It smelled good, but Eren never tried it since he preferred tea over most other kinds of drinks.

The old man carefully sat down where that detective was, balancing himself and grunting as he sat down. Eren was confused why this old man decided to speak with him.

"Mr. Yeager, was it?" The man asked, his voice deep and gravely.

Eren nodded.

"The Akuma no Ko, I believe." The old man said.

There was a long silence between the two men, one that persisted for a while. Eren stayed quiet, letting the man set the initiative in their conversation.

Ironically, this treatment made Eren feel better. The other guy was far too kind, and it made Eren uncomfortable. This old man showed power and dominance, despite his frail appearance. He seemed like the kind of man who would cut a prisoner's fingers off, which filled Eren with a sense of morbid familiarity.

"Do you know who I am?" The man asked.

"Should I?" Eren asked.

He had a decent memory and knew for a fact he never saw this man before.

"Maybe if I introduce myself, you'll recognize me." The man said. "I believe in western culture, being your culture, family name is placed last. So, I will introduce myself as Gan'an Shinomiya."

"Shinomiya." Eren said, as in Kaguya?

"I believe you should be familiar with our family name." He said.

"Same last name as Kaguya." Eren recognized.

"Yes, she is a member of the Shinomiya name." He said. "So, tell me Eren, can you guess to what relationship Kaguya and myself share?"

It was a weird request, but Eren decided to play along. He thought for a moment, considering the man's old age and what he could possibly be. Probably the patriarch of the family, given his dominant presence and in control attitude.

"I'd guess you're her grandfather." Eren stated.

Shinomiya actually chuckled at that, a bit surprised that Eren knows nothing of the Shinomiya conglomerate.

"I suppose at my age, that would be a fair guess." He said.

"But your reaction says otherwise." Eren said.

"True." Shinomiya said. "I am her father."

Eren wasn't really surprised. Kaguya was the daughter of a noble, which meant that her father could either marry a young woman or take a young woman as his mistress. Such relationships were common with nobility within the walls and even among nobles beyond the walls.

"So, why are you here?" Eren asked.

The news reported that Eren kidnapped Kaguya, and no one except Miyuki, Hayasaka, and Kaguya knew the truth. No doubt her father would want revenge.

"Curiosity." Shinomiya said.

"That's it?" Eren asked.

"It pains me a great deal to say this, but I have been a terrible father to my children." He said. "A good father would not play favorites with

his children; however, I am not a good father."

"Ok." Eren said, not sure where this was going.

"My little Kaguya is the most precious thing I have on this earth. I adored and loved her mother, even though she died giving my daughter life." Shinomiya said. "I love her more than my own three sons, which only shows the failure that I am as a father."

"Sorry to hear that." Eren said genuinely.

"Even as a father to her, I still was not the best. Her mother was a prostitute in the Gion red-light district. She was as cunning as she was beautiful. I'll admit, I fell in love with her mind as much as her beauty."

So, he loved a mistress, seems normal as far as Eren was concerned about nobles.

"I often wondered if she ever loved me. I believe Kaguya inherited her mother's cunning more than anything from me. I often wondered if she simply used me to leave the red-light district, but I then conclude that it doesn't matter."

"Doesn't matter?" Eren asked.

"Does it matter if the people we love, love us back?" He asked cryptically. "After all, if young Hoshino-San hated and despised you, would you do anything less than protect her as you have?"

"I guess I would still protect her." Eren agreed.

"After she died, I swore to give my daughter everything her mother did not have in her life. I always feared that my daughter would find her way to a red-light district, as unlikely as that scenario would be. Looking back, I may have sheltered her too much. I even bribed her school from avoiding teaching about sex in her general health education." He explained.

Eren guessed that explained Kaguya's lack of knowledge about the subject.

"Until of course, that Shirogane boy ruined that." There was a slight annoyance to his voice.

"I guess you don't like him." Eren observed.

"Can any boy live up to a father's expectations when it comes to his daughter?" Shinomiya asked.

"I wouldn't know." Eren said.

"You'll learn, in time." He said, though Eren doubted it since he'll be executed soon. "Though, my opinion had changed when he rescued my daughter." Shinomiya said.

That confused Eren. He made sure Miyuki wasn't at all tied back to that operation. No one should know who saved Kaguya, especially after Kaguya lied. Did she tell her father?

"You're surprised?" Shinomiya asked. "As cunning as my daughter is, I doubt any child can really lie to their parents. Despite how flawless her lie was, I knew it was a lie. I know my daughter very well, though even now she still believes that she deceived me."

"So, how'd you know it was Miyuki?" Eren asked.

"Your plan to rescue my daughter was, to be completely honest, terrible." Eren glared at the insult.

"You knew it was me?" Eren asked.

"A single police officer decides to infiltrate a Yakuza base without calling for back up, and fights in a very unusual style, a style matching footage of the Akuma no Ko, and you expect people to believe it wasn't you?" Shinomiya asked.

Was it really that odd? Even Yoshida mentioned that. It's not unusual for Military Police to go into an area alone or with whoever was around. It's not like they can easily call for help.

Though considering everyone has moveable phones, Eren figured it would make sense for them to call for help.

"However, after that, my daughter began to visit a very unusual group of people. Though she's a fan of B-Komachi, it did still strike me as odd that she would visit the lead idol. And even stranger, hear my guards say there was a westerner that visited as well. It's not hard to put two and two together Eren." Shinomiya explained.

"So, you knew who I was even back then." Eren said.

"Despite how intelligent I am, coincidences are still possible. So, I asked the head of the Police Department to tap your phone, just to make sure. The police knew who you were from then on." He said.

"So why not arrest me then?" Eren asked.

"The police wanted to. I dare say that you should be grateful that I annually donate a large sum of money to the police, otherwise they would have." Shinomiya said. "I only had them listen in, which was cute when we saw how you and Ai texted each other." He laughed.

Eren actually blushed a bit, feeling like his privacy was just violated, which it was.

"Not to mention, you had help from a Russian arms dealer the government has been tracking for two decades. Sadly, his phone was far too encrypted, with a triple defense of VPNs, a PUK, and a false sim card. Impossible to find, even with hacking your phone."

Eren smiled, it seems Sergei managed to escape the police.

"However, you piqued my curiosity." Shinomiya said.

"Oh?" Eren asked.

"I at first believed that you rescued my daughter as a bargaining chip. A way to be granted a boon from me and either use it to secure your freedom or to make money. So, I waited for the inevitable call. I even assumed that's why you spoke with my daughter after the rescue. Only to discover that no such call came." Shinomiya said.

"I didn't really care." Eren shrugged.

"Which was odd to me." Shinomiya said. "So, I watched and waited. Wondering just what kind of man you are. A man who could take on an entire Yakuza gang without any issues."

"And?" Eren asked.

"I'm not a man that's blind to the desperation of a man who has nothing. I am quiet liberal in my beliefs when it comes to those who commit crimes out of desperation. However, your crimes are too numerous and great for me to try and help you simply because you were desperate." He said.

"Then why are we having this conversation?" Eren asked.

"As I said, I love my daughter more than anything. Even if I am terrible at showing it. For that reason, and that reason alone, I will give you a second chance." He said.

"How would you?" Eren asked. "It's pretty clear who I am."

"Is it?" Shinomiya asked. "There's only two pieces of evidence that ties Eren Yeager and the Akuma no Ko. Your thumb print on the gun recovered at the concert, and the testimony of a talent agency manager." He said.

"Thumb print?" Eren asked, though Shinomiya ignored him.

"However, it seems that through a recent inspection from... what's the western equivalent, councilman Fujiwara," Eren recognized that name. "Some old thumb prints in the registry were deleted due to

corrupted files. So, we don't have anything matching your thumb print."

"Ok." Eren said, still not sure what a thumb print meant in this context.

"As for the testimony, most law enforcement officials don't charge people based on a single witness account. Witnesses have often been discredited if there isn't more evidence to corroborate their accounts. So, the police cannot charge you." He said.

"Really?" Eren asked.

"You were just an unfortunate case of mistaken identity when you were strolling around a ship that was attacked due to a Yakuza disagreement, and even helped to save Hoshino-San and her children when she escaped. It can be an issue for foreigners." He explained.

"Seems farfetched." Eren said.

"Make no mistake, everyone will know this is a cover up. The public will know that you are the Akuma no Ko and will still treat you accordingly, either out of fear or hatred." Shinomiya explained.

"I really don't care if people see me as a devil again." Eren shrugged, though Shinomiya was confused, he dropped the question he had.

"There's a lot I could do." He said. "I can bribe the news to not report on it. I can request to social media platforms to bury any mentions of you, so the story doesn't trend. But that won't hide the truth. People will know who you are and will know that we swept this under the rug."

"Is that bad?" Eren asked.

"No doubt, they will come up with conspiracies. Maybe you're a secret government weapon. Maybe, you're an undercover agent.

The media will come up with any outlandish story to make money. However, outside of your reputation being ruined, nothing bad will happen. Which would make a relationship with you and Ai very interesting."

"Again, I don't care about what people think of me." Eren said.

"I suppose not." Shinomiya said.

"So that's it. You're just going to let me go?" Eren asked.

"You're freedom for my daughter's life. It's a fair deal I would say." Shinomiya said. "Many people don't fully understand the power and influence I have in Japan. Many politicians owe their seats due to me funding their campaign. Many agencies depend on my generous contributions when the government gets stingy with funding. I could make people disappear or make people whoever I want them to be. For my daughter's safety, I chose to make you innocent."

Eren chuckled darkly to himself. It seems nobles aren't so different in this world.

"However, there is the issue of your status in Japan." Shinomiya said.

"What issue?" Eren asked.

"Eren Yeager, although not charged as the Akuma no Ko, is still an illegal immigrant within Japan. An illegal that either needs to be deported or needs to claim sanctuary status. Given your desperation to join the Yakuza, I'd wager that you are unable to find work." Shinomiya said.

"It would be a smart wager." Eren said.

"Seeing as how I already risked my reputation to sweep this all under the rug, I'll need compensation from you if you want to find work in Japan." He said.

"You're forcing me to work for you?" Eren glared.

"Forcing... no. In fact, to show you that I am not, I will hire one of my best lawyers to not only ensure you gain sanctuary status, but also to help you one day become a Japanese citizen." He said.

"So, what do you want?" Eren asked.

"Because everyone knows you're the Akuma no Ko, you'd never be able to find legitimate work. As further help, I can help you find employment, while also having your skills benefit Japan as a whole." He said.

"So, what did you have in mind?" Eren asked.

"A dear friend of mine is the director of Naicho, the Cabinet Intelligence and Research Office. Your skills would be a great asset for us." He said.

"You'd ask someone who has no formal education and is functionally illiterate in your language?" Eren asked.

"You're an investment, an investment worth making." He said.

"Education is easy, I can get you a free ride at a four-year university. Where you'll learn not only written English and Japanese, but the Japanese language and a criminal studies degree. In exchange, I request a minimum of six years of service to Naicho."

"What do I get out of six years of service?" Eren asked.

"Naicho members are paid very well. You won't be rich mind you, but you would be able to support... say... a wife and three kids comfortably. Hypothetically speaking. If you complete twenty years of service, you can receive a pension for the rest of your life." He said.

It sounded like a very good deal all around. Earn his freedom, get paid decently, and support Ai if they stay together.

"Four years of school and six years of service. So, ten total?" Eren asked.

"You get federal holidays off and at least thirty vacation days a year. A very good deal for someone who loves to travel. Especially since their work often takes them to foreign countries." He said.

"Fine." Eren said.

He supposed it wouldn't be too different from the Scouts.

"One last thing." Shinomiya said. "That repelling gear you had, I had some questions."

"Like what?" Eren asked.

"The blades are unlike anything I've seen. Initial investigation on them shows that the blades are made of an unknown metal, while the gas in the tanks is made of a material that's not known on the periodic table. Did your nation invent this?" He asked

"Yes." Eren nodded.

"What country is that?" Shinomiya asked.

"As I've said, I'm from another world. So, the nation of Eldia." Eren repeated.

There was a moment of silence as Shinomiya looked at Eren, trying to sense a deception in his voice. Shinomiya concluded that Eren was an amazing liar since he could say that with no trace of deception.

Eren though, he knew it was futile to try and convince anyone where he truly came from.

"I see." Shinomiya said. "I don't blame you for wanting to maintain the secrets of your country, and I won't pry. Though, I do believe this technology could be used well in the civilian sector. I may open up a

branch to produce it, though it would need modifications since it seems difficult to control."

"Go ahead." Eren shrugged.

"Excellent." Shinomiya said. "I'll see myself out and secure your release. Young Hoshino-San and even B-Komachi will be waiting at my mansion. Even my daughter and her friends wanted to pay a visit. I'll have a driver take you. Please enjoy the reunion."

As Shinomiya walked out, Eren was partially in shock. He was free. Not only that, but he'd actually have stable employment. All because he rescued Kaguya.

Not only that, but he could also have a life with Ai. He could actually raise this child with her and have a family he was deprived of for so long. Since his mother died, Eren didn't feel like he had a family. There was Mikasa, but she was different.

Eren could build his life and would still get to explore the world.

He still felt guilty, since the Devil of Paradis would continue to live a happy life, despite everything he has done.

But Eren looked forward to the possibility of rebuilding his life.

The Next Day

Eren got out of the car after resting overnight in prison. From what Shinomiya told him, Ai was informed of the situation and that Eren would be a free man.

It was such a strange situation for him to be in. For the first time in a long time, maybe since before the walls fell, Eren felt at peace. The Titans were gone, the war was over, and even now, he has the potential of future employment and a chance to have a family.

He never realized he'd ever be in this situation. Maybe it was selfish of him to want it, after all, he was still a devil. He deserved death.

But he always kept moving forward, no matter what. Even if he didn't deserve this, he'd act on his selfish impulse and live a happy life.

Eren reached into his pocket to ensure that he still had the piece of paper that he wrote. It was a single sentence in Eldian that he intended to read when he saw Ai.

"To live a long and happy life." Eren said to himself.

The future that was robbed from him, ever since he learned of the Curse of Ymir.

Eren walked through the doors into the large mansion. Well, more of a palace really. It reminded him a lot of the castle in the interior, the one that Historia resided in. It was beautiful on the ins-

Eren fell back as a purple blur crashed into him at full speed. He wondered why his reflexes didn't respond, but he instantly knew what hit him. Eren fell onto his rear, maintaining a sitting posture as Ai's weight practically crashed into him.

"Eren!" Meimei called out from behind where Ai came from.

"Meimei." Eren nodded.

"Me first!" Ai yelled as she tightened her hug.

"Sorry." Eren chuckled. "Ai." He said in the same tone.

"Baka." Ai said with a small chuckle of her own.

Eren stood up as Ai got off of him. She stood next to him, letting her hands fall and rest in his hands. She smiled warmly as she looked up at him.

Amazingly, when they got to the mansion, Kaguya's father was there to deliver the news. It was a huge shock to Kaguya, who believed that her father would never do something that could damage his reputation like this just because Eren saved her.

Ai looked sadly at the old man as he realized he was too absent from his daughter's life. He swore to her that he would be a better father, a promise that ended up making Kaguya cry.

"Welcome to my mansion Eren." Kaguya curtsied.

"Yea, good to see you again." Fujiwara said cheerfully. "I never realized you saved Kaguya, so thanks for that."

"You don't need to thank me." Eren said.

"And saving Ai." Saitou said. "I may have been rude to you, though I do feel I was justified, but thank you for saving her Eren. I am sorry for how I treated you."

"Like you said, it was justified." Eren shrugged.

"Just promise me you'll avoid a future in crime if you stay with Ai." He asked.

"If?" Eren asked.

"Just promise me." Saitou said.

Eren didn't fully understand their relationship, but he did know that Saitou was basically a father to Ai. He understood that Saitou would be concerned for her.

"I don't plan on it." Eren said.

"Don't be bad papa." Ruby said in her broken English. "If papa bad, papa punished."

"I won't." Eren said with a slight twitch of his eyebrow. He really didn't plan to go back into crime.

"Yea pa- Eren." Aqua said, intentionally trying to sound like his English was broken as well.

Eren chuckled at that. Aqua tried to call him papa, but now that they knew each other's secrets, Eren and Aqua doubted that they could pretend to be a father and son. Especially since Aqua was older than Eren.

So, they decided to avoid that kind of relationship and just remain respectful to each other. Aqua did begin to look to Eren as a kind of mentor, but it's too weird to see him as a father.

What Eren lacked in his age, he made up for in life experience.

"Oh, Meimei." Ai said, remembering something. "Bring the thing."

"Thing?" Eren asked.

"Yea, the thing." Ai said.

Meimei ran over to one of the rooms for a moment, and carried out a small bucket that looked a little heavy for her. She struggled to bring it in but handed it to Eren. Eren took it and raised his eyebrow as he looked inside.

"A bucket of salt?" Eren asked.

"Yes." Ai nodded. "Now, you can propose to me."

"What?" Eren asked.

"Seriously?" Meimei asked. "You proposed before, so just do it again."

"Why the bucket of salt?" Eren asked.

"Because you said it's in your custom." Ai said. "So, I wanted to try your way of proposing."

"My custom?" Eren asked, still confused.

"Yea, you said in your culture, you propose with a bucket of salt." Meimei said, confused why they were explaining this to Eren.

"... That was a joke." Eren said in a deadpanned expression.

"... Seriously?" Ai asked.

"I was making a joke about buying expensive things for a marriage." Eren said. "Did you all really think we proposed with a bucket of salt?" He asked.

The entire group, both the B-Komachi group and the Student Council were silent. They all really thought that Eren's home proposed with a bucket of salt.

"Hehehe..." Eren started to laugh. "Hehe, hahahahaha!" Eren actually broke out in laughter.

This wasn't his usual laughter, which he did when he was emotionally unstable. This was a genuine laugh. A laughter that told of good times and happy memories.

When was the last time he actually laughed like this? Did he ever?

"Ok, please stop laughing, it's creepy coming from you." Meimei said.

"Yea, I never heard him laugh." Miyako said. "Not a normal laugh anyway."

Ai though, smiled at Eren. It was a genuine laugh. An actual expression of happiness that was always so rare coming from Eren. He did express happiness, but it was either subtle or rare. She hoped she could make him laugh more often and make him happy.

"So, after everything you said about wanting to take a relationship slow, you want to get married now?" Eren said as his laughter died down, though his smile stayed.

"Well, I'm pregnant with your baby now, so I think we should regardless." Ai said logically. "Besides, with my reputation destroyed, finding another boyfriend would be hard. So, I suppose I'll settle for you." She crossed her arms, though her voice betrayed her joking tone.

"Settle for me?" Eren asked with a small smirk.

"Yes." Ai nodded.

"I don't know." Eren said. "I just realized I do love idols now, and since you are no longer an idol, I guess I don't want to be with you anymore."

Ai was shocked that Eren actually played along, but she smiled as he did. He seemed so much calmer and happier now.

"Ba-"

"Baka." Eren cut Ai off, causing her to pout.

"Ok, you two are cute. But can you just propose so we can get videos." Miyako said in annoyance as she held up her phone.

"Sure." Eren said. "I'll even use the bucket." He said.

Eren walked up to Ai and held the bucket out to her.

"Ai-"

"You need to be on one knee." Meimei said.

"Why?" Eren said.

"It's romantic." Meimei said.

"I thought we were following my customs." Eren said.

"Well, apparently you have no customs, so we need to improvise." Meimei said.

What is with this country and ceremonies?

Eren got down to one knee and held up the bucket of salt to Ai, who had her hand over her mouth, trying desperately not to laugh.

Eren was actually starting to feel embarrassed.

"Ai, I want you to marry me." Eren said.

"You have to ask her, not tell her." Meimei said.

Eren was going to throw this bucket of salt at her.

"Will you marry me." He said.

"Yes!" Ai said as she hugged Eren, causing him to lose his hold on the bucket and spill it on the floor next to them.

Ai held Eren tightly, glad that everything ended up working out. Her reputation was still destroyed, and her career was gone, but who cares. She had a family that she loved and had a new member on the way.

She realized that her fans love was truly fake, while Eren and her children truly did love her. That's the only love she needed.

"I love you Eren." Ai said.

"Yea, Ruby loves papa!" Ruby ran up to Eren and hugged him too.

"I'll just stay over- whoa!" Aqua yelled out as Ai reached for him and forced him into the hug.

Aqua relented and hugged the group.

As the new family hugged each other, Eren used this time to take out a piece of paper that he had in his pocket, which had a single phrase written in Eldian. He looked at it and sounded it out.

"Skee, Dye, Yo." He sounded out.

Ai giggled at his use of the language. Though, the actual phrase he said is typically used in a less romantic way, more of a way to say you intend to date someone instead of actually loving them. More of a phrase a boy would use when he wanted to confess to his crush. But she smiled at his attempt. It was cute.

" *Ai Shiteru Yo.* " Ai said, using the proper phrasing.

"Huh?" Eren asked.

"Nothing." Ai smiled.

For the first time in so long, Eren felt at peace.

One more chapter to go, the epilogue.

I'm not going to lie; this chapter scares me lol. I really hope I made it believable in how Eren can be cleared of his charges. This is the main reason I introduced Love is War. I don't do cameos for the sake of them, they need to have a purpose in the story. Given the context of the power of the Shinomiya conglomerate, I'd say it could work lol.

Like with Yoshida and Sergei, Gan'an was able to piece everything together by himself. Most readers don't question Eren's tactics to save Kaguya, but if you have a military or law enforcement background, you'd easily be able to pick up on how odd it was. Something that Eren, who is from a world without radios or phones, wouldn't recognize. At least, this is the intent.

I hope I accurately conveyed Gan'an's reasoning and the power he has to be able to do such a thing. I'd say it falls in line with what he

could do in Love is War.

However, just because Eren avoided jail, doesn't mean he completely escapes the court of public opinion, which will probably have more ramifications in the sequel.

It's a farfetched scenario, but in line with an anime I think.

Please let me know if it made sense or was satisfying. I've been building to this moment for literal months. Hopefully it met expectations.

As always, hope you guys enjoy and I'll release the last chapter soon.

A Second Chance

Chapter 48: A Second Chance

One Week Later

"I have to get a mortgage?" Eren asked Ai.

"Well, if we plan to buy a house." Ai said. "We could also rent, which would be more expensive on the short term, but we can move at any time after our contract is up."

"So, we need a loan from a bank?" Eren asked.

"Yes, plus utilities, like electric, water, and gas." Ai explained.

Eren felt like his head was going to explode. There was so much that went into just getting a house. You need a loan from a bank to buy one if you don't rent, which can take decades to pay off. You also need internet, electricity, water etc.

"Can't we just bring water from a river to fill up our baths?" Eren asked.

"We're not living a rural lifestyle." Ai glared at him. "Besides, that would be so unsanitary. What if we get parasites?"

"We can use alcohol to sterilize it." Eren said.

"Or, we can pay for running water and buy a filter for the sink. Plus, how would we use the restroom?"

"I just grew up with a bucket that you'd dump out every few days." Eren shrugged.

"That's disgusting!" Ai yelled out. "I knew you were rural, but that's much more rural than I've ever seen."

"It's really not that bad." Eren shrugged.

"I'm not having our children live in a house with a bucket full of poop!" Ai yelled out. "After living in that apartment for so long, you never wondered why you had running water?"

"Sergei handled most of that when it came to payments." Eren shrugged. "I never realized so much money went into these kinds of things."

Eren was glad Gan'an was not only paying him to go to a higher education, but also beginning his salary. As he put it-

" In the short term it'll cost me money, but considering your skills, I see it as a long-term investment. The potential good you can do for Japan will outweigh the initial loss early on. "

The only issue is that he's not going to pay Eren's actual salary until he starts in four years. So, Eren and Ai will live counting their money for those first few years. While they will be able to afford most necessities, it still amazed Eren just how quickly their money drained with all these purchases.

"Plus, we'll need to start buying furniture, baby supplies, food-"

"We have furniture." Eren said. "From our apartments."

"We don't own those." Ai said. "Once we leave there, we can't bring the furniture."

"Then why was it so expensive?" Eren asked.

"Didn't you pay rent where you grew up?" Ai asked.

"No." Eren said. "Everything was largely free, as long as you built everything."

"Yet you needed to go to the river for your bath and drinking water?" Ai asked.

"Or get sticks for fuel." Eren shrugged.

"And dump waste from a bucket?" Ai asked.

"I get it, that's all pretty much necessary here." Eren said. "It's still expensive."

"Don't worry, I can help with the managing the bills. After all, I won't be able to work for a while, not until all this controversy blows over." She said. "But that's ok, I look forward to be a stay-at-home mom. I was always sad when I had to leave Aqua and Ruby. Plus, this little guy will need some loving too."

Ai gently put her hand on her belly, which was now just barely showing noticeable signs of a bump. She was sad her career was over, but she saw this as a new opportunity to truly feel loved.

She always believed that the love her fans gave her was what love was supposed to be, even if it was a lie. But after the past two months, she learned that it wasn't real at all. It was an obsession, something that was conditional as long as she met their expectations. Now, she knew what love truly felt like. The love of her children, and now her soon to be husband.

"Plus, I want to be with Aqua after what happened." She said sadly.

"You said he killed someone." Eren said.

"Yes, with a weird knife he found. I don't even know where he got it." Ai said.

"He probably swiped it from a guard or something." Eren shrugged.

While Ai noticed Eren wasn't entirely being truthful, she disregarded that thought since there's no way Eren would know how Aqua got the knife.

"It's just... after Ryosuke, Kamiki, that Yakuza guy, and now Yoshida... I'm so worried about him. I'm honestly terrified at how he'll end up." Ai said.

"He's a strong kid." Eren said, knowing that it would be easy for Aqua to process those emotions since he is an adult. "I think he'll be fi-"

"No!" Ai yelled out, trying to stop from crying. "He's an innocent little baby and never should have had to do that. It's my job to protect him. And twice now he fought a Yakuza guy to protect me and Ruby. What is wrong with him? Why can't he be a normal boy who hides behind his mother?"

"Because he loves his mother." Eren said as he hugged Ai. "Trust me, I was as much of a foolish boy as him. Even when my mother tried to protect me, I still tried my hardest to save her."

"Still, I made up my mind. Kaguya said she knows a therapist that could help him. Apparently, he's the husband of one of her teachers." Ai said.

"What is that?" Eren said.

"Someone who can talk with you and help you come to terms with your emotions." She explained. "It'll be a bit expensive, but Kaguya said he'll give us a discount considering the situation."

"Then you shouldn't worry." Eren said. "Trust me, Aqua will be fine."

"How can you be sure?" Ai asked.

"Because all of my rage started at my mother's death. With you alive, I doubt Aqua would go down the same dark road as me. He has no reason to seek revenge and no hatred from the loss of his family. I think he'll be ok." Eren said.

"Still, I'm getting him the sessions. He needs professional help." Ai said.

"Well, if you're sure then I'll support it." Eren said.

"I hope so, you're the only one making money now." Ai giggled.

"Though I may have to prioritize these bills over-" Ai glared at Eren.
"I'm joking." He chuckled.

"No jokes about our baby." Ai said.

"Our?" Eren asked.

"Well, yes. Ruby already see's you as her papa. And Aqua may not say it, but I think he sees you in the same way. So, they're your children as much as they are mine now." She smiled.

Huh... Eren was a father. He didn't really consider himself as one until Ai said it. Which is weird since he did have a child with Historia, though considering he thought he was going to die before he had the chance to be a father.

Why did his knees feel weak?

"Eren!" Ai yelled as Eren collapsed on the ground.

Eren caught himself and stayed in a sitting position for a moment before shaking his head. It was like the realization that he was going to finally see a child of his own hit him all at once. It made his knees go weak and made him lose his balance.

"Are you ok?" Ai knelt down next to him.

"Just got light headed." Eren waived her off.

"You know, Miyako-San said President Saitou reacted the same way when he realized he was going to be a dad." She giggled.

"I'm just thirsty." Eren said, standing up.

He didn't want to admit to himself that he nearly passed out from the shock of having a child.

Ai giggled at the event. He was such a kind man who cared a lot about his family. Especially his new one. Sure, he can be scary at times, but he has only ever been scary when it came to protecting the people he cared about.

"You should go let Aqua know the news." Eren said.

"About the therapist?" Ai asked.

"Yea, he might be upset if you wait." Eren said.

"True, I guess I should go talk to him." She said.

Ai walked over to her baby boy who was messing around on her phone. He was sitting on the bed in the room Ai stayed in, the one she's been in for the past two weeks. She will miss the lavish lifestyle of Kaguya's manor, but she was excited to get back to a normal lifestyle.

"Are you watching anything bad Aqua-Chan?" Ai asked, swiping her phone before he could react.

"Just the news mama." Aqua sighed, knowing that she knew and was going to be upset.

"What did I say about watching the news?" Ai asked.

"I was just curious about the articles on Eren." He said.

Ai looked at the articles and it still surprised her. CCTV captured Eren literally swinging around the dock and ship, using a combination of rocket launchers and detachable swords. The police got their hands on that weird gear but didn't release any information to the public yet.

It was a sight to see, though YouTube and Facebook heavily censored the images considering there were people dying in those videos.

"Aqua-Chan, you know this isn't good for you to watch." She said.

"I was just curious." He shrugged.

Aqua remained his stoic self, which brought some relief since he normally acted like that. She'd be worried if there was a massive change in his personality after what happened, though she'd wait for the therapist to come up with his diagnosis.

"Aqua-Chan, there's something I wanted to talk to you about." Ai said as she sat next to him on the bed.

"What is it mama?" He asked.

"I've scheduled some therapy for you." She said, choosing to just say it without beating around the bush.

"Therapy?" He asked. "For what?"

For what? Does he not realize why? After all the trauma he went through in the past two months, does he really need to ask why she would send him to therapy?

"Tell me Aqua, how are you feeling after what happened on the ship?" She asked. "Please, talk to mama. Let mama know your thoughts."

Know his thoughts? What did she want to know? It's not like it bothered him much. After all, Ruby and Ai were safe. That's all that mattered and what made him happy.

Although... was he not bothered? Aqua thought about the events that happened between killing Hikaru and that random Yakuza guard. As with Hikaru, Aqua felt nothing. No sadness or anything. Just the same desire to protect his family.

"Please Aqua-Chan. Please talk to me." Ai almost begged as she placed a hand around his shoulder.

"I don't know mama." He said honestly. "I honestly haven't thought about it much. The only thing I care about is that you and Ruby are safe I guess."

Aqua could tell Ai was worried. Thinking about it, he understood. Children don't just kill people and feel nothing about it. Especially at his age.

Luckily, him killing the Yakuza guard wasn't mentioned to the police, mainly because Ai was worried about any kind of legal action against Aqua. Was it a dumb fear? Maybe, but mothers aren't always rational when it comes to their children's safety.

"I know you have a desire to protect us Aqua-Chan. And I won't pretend to be an expert in psychology." She said. "But I want you to know that mama will always be here for you. No matter what you feel or what you do, mama will always love you."

Ai wrapped her arms around Aqua and gave him a big hug, closing her eyes and enjoying the feeling of her tiny son in her arms. She was so worried for his mental health, but Eren was right. He's a strong boy and as long as she's alive to guide him, he'll be ok.

"Do I really have to go?" Aqua asked.

"Don't argue with Doctor Ai." She joked.

"I'd have to see your credentials." Aqua said.

"All mama's are doctors, so I have your birth certificate to prove it." She giggled.

"It's a forgery." He said.

"Nope, I'll never forget the day you and Ruby-Chan came into the world. It was the most amazing day of my life." And the most painful.

Like, pain beyond imagining. Never in her life did she imagine such pain existed. They without a doubt came out of her. She will never forget that pain for as long as she lives. And she never wanted to go through that ag-

"Oh know..." Ai said to herself.

"What?" Aqua asked as he broke from her hug.

She's going to have to go through it again...

"Let's get some food before the appointment." Ai said cheerfully.

Yes, do something, anything to take her mind off of the inevitable pain that she is going to experience all over again. Hopefully this time she can request a C-section.

"Aqua, please come in." The therapist said.

Aqua walked into the room alone. It was a cozy little place, with a few seats and a couch that surrounded a coffee table with snacks and drinks, mostly soft drinks like soda.

"Want a drink?" The therapist asked.

"I don't know if mama will let me." He said.

"I asked, and she said it's fine. Afterall, you're here to relax." He said.

His therapist was an older man, probably around his age before he died. He was a skinny man with wrinkles that would be normal for a man of his age, with round glasses on his eyes. He was skinny, very skinny, but he seemed kind and soft.

"Normally I handle adults, but my wife told me about you so I wanted to take on this case." He said.

"Sure." Aqua shrugged.

Aqua sat down on the couch and relaxed a bit. He wouldn't be able to really be honest about himself, but it might be good to get some things off his chest. Although, he couldn't talk about the killings since therapists were still obligated to report crimes.

Only religious leaders had the policy of absolute confidentiality. You can tell a priest you murdered someone last night and normally they'll keep it confidential. Though, individuals may be different in how they approach that subject.

"What's your name?" Aqua asked.

"Raito." He said. "Though out of curiosity, do you prefer Aqua or Goro?"

"Aqua's fi-" Aqua widened his eyes.

"Surprised?" Raito chuckled.

"How-" Aqua said in astonishment.

"My wife told me about you." He chuckled. "She said her ex-boyfriend was reborn as an infant to an idol, and when Kaguya told her that Ai was looking for the therapist, she asked me to help. Which is why I decided to treat you even though I don't normally treat children."

"Please don't tell me your wife is Kuro..." Aqua said with a deadpanned look.

"You know, she said you'd react that way." Raito laughed.

"How do you believe me?" He asked.

"Well, I'm into the occult too. Plus, she never lies to me." He said.

"Considering you literally have her collared." Aqua said.

"Yes, our relationship is unconventional." He chuckled. "I know the mind very well and how it works. So, it was easy for us to be together."

"Her mind is a darkness I'd rather avoid." Aqua said.

"But we're not here to discuss my wife. Instead, we're here to talk about you. And I dare say that I am the only person qualified to deal with your situation." Raito said.

"I wasn't expecting to have to be honest." Aqua said.

"You still don't." Raito said calmly. "You don't even need to talk to me. Only share what you're comfortable with sharing. Nothing more and nothing less."

"Where should I start?" Aqua asked.

"Well, let's start with your father." He said.

"How much did she tell you?" Aqua asked in an annoyed tone.

"Not much." Raito said. "But I also read the news on the event and assumed that you're the one who killed him. After all, you're too old mentally to be tricked like that."

Aqua remained silent, not wanting to admit the crime to someone who could tell the police.

"If you're worried about me telling the police, don't. Considering the situation, I'll keep full confidentiality. Besides, no one would believe me." He said.

"True." Aqua said. "I mean, what's there to say? He wanted to kill Ai and I struck first."

"Yet as Goro, you never once even got into a fight." He said.

"No, no I didn't." Aqua said.

"You know, even if it's people we hate, most people hesitate to kill. Though between him and the guard on the ship, you showed no hesitation." Raito said.

"How do you know that?" Aqua asked.

"Your mother told me, since she wanted me to focus on that."

Ai really was hopeless sometimes. Did she not realize the danger in admitting he murdered someone. She's lucky Raito won't call the cops.

"Hikaru, my father, said he was a psychopath." Aqua said. "How he felt no empathy or emotions when he got people killed. So, he used Ai as a test to see if he would feel guilt over killing someone he cared for."

"Do you believe you inherited his psychopathy?" Raito asked.

"That's what he said, and to be honest, I felt nothing when I killed them." Aqua said honestly. "I know Goro would have felt bad, but Aqua doesn't. I don't know if biologically my brain is different, or if there is some kind of interference between my hormones and memories."

"True, you are essentially an adult in a child's body. Just as your muscles are weak, so to can your actual brain be different."

"It's just. I don't know what to think." Aqua looked down. "I know how I should feel. I even remember one time feeling bad because I ran over a deer on my way to work one time. But lately, I've felt nothing when I killed those men. In a way, it scares me."

"It's a difficult situation to be in." Raito said.

"I don't know what to think." Aqua said.

"Unfortunately, there's really nothing I have to help you in that regard. I can't even run tests since I'd lose my license if I tried to

explain this. I could only publish this as a thought experiment and not a real one. So, our options are limited." He said.

"I know." Aqua said. "The other thing is that I don't know who I am. Whether the soul of Goro passed on or if somehow Goro's soul is in Aqua's body. I don't know how this works. Eren said it doesn't matter and all that should matter is who I decide to be."

"That sounds like good advice." Raito nodded. "However, maybe there is a different perspective."

"How so?" Aqua asked.

"I've heard about Eren, and he does seem like someone who has a lot of life experience. But we all react differently to situations. He doesn't strike me as the kind of person to have an existential crisis like this."

"That's true." Aqua chuckled.

"However, if you want my perspective, I'd say that you should focus on what you can and cannot control." He said.

"How so?" Aqua asked.

"You can't control how this rebirth works, so don't worry so much about it. Fact is, we'll never learn who you really are from a scientific point of view. So, you should focus on what you can control. Maybe you do lack emotions, or maybe you don't. We can't control that. But what you can control, is how you react to situations. Psychopathy doesn't mean you have no emotion at all. Some psychopaths' express emotions differently or are less affected by emotional stimuli. If you truly were emotionless, I believe you wouldn't care for Ai and Ruby nearly as much as you do."

"So, I do have emotions?" Aqua asked.

"True emotionless feelings is functionally impossible. Many people are psychopaths without being diagnosed and live good and moral lives. Psychopaths who commit crimes are no different than any other criminal. Many who do resort to crime do so because of traumatic experiences like everyone else."

"Hikaru did mention he was molested by an adult woman when he was a kid." Aqua said.

"Psychopath or not, many people would resort to murder if they don't learn to process their emotions from such a traumatic event." He said. "I'm sure Hikaru did feel emotions, he just never learned to recognize it. After all, he wouldn't be so affected by that event if he truly felt nothing."

"He said I could be just like him." Aqua said.

"Or you could be different." Raito countered. "It's not how we feel that determines what we do. It's how we react to those emotions. By reacting appropriately and learning to process your emotions correctly, you can avoid many negative thoughts."

"I've tried, I really have." Aqua said. "It's just, lately I've cared less and less about my own safety. I'm basically having a near death experience weekly at this point."

"Yet each time was to save Ai." He said.

"Of course, she's my mother." Aqua said.

"We both know that as far as how you view her, she's not your mother." Raito said. "You may have learned to accept that fact overtime, but you knew her before you were reborn. It's not a simple relationship."

"True." Aqua nodded. "In some ways I see Ai as like a daughter, someone who I helped care for while she was pregnant. In other

ways, I see her as my mother, though that was more recent. It's complicated."

"Are you obsessed with her, as an idol I mean." He asked.

Was he? Aqua had to think about that for a moment.

"I don't know." Aqua said.

"If she did die, what do you think you would have done?" Raito asked.

"Honestly... I don't want to live in a world without Ai." He said.

"Sounds more like an obsession." Raito said.

"It's just..." Aqua began, thinking about how he really felt about Ai.
"Ai was introduced to me by a patient of mine. A girl named Sarina."
He said.

"Who was she to you?" Raito asked.

"Sarina was a young girl, barely a teenager who was terminally ill. Cancer." He said sadly. "I cared for her when she was abandoned at the hospital. She was so innocent and kind. I can honestly say I loved her, much in the same way a father would love his daughter."

"And she died." Raito concluded.

Aqua slumped back into his chair.

"I couldn't save her. No matter what treatment we gave her, all we could do was make her as comfortable as possible."

"And you blame yourself?" Raito asked.

"I know I shouldn't... but we can't control how we feel sometimes."
Aqua said.

"Sarina was obsessed with Ai, wasn't she?"

"Yes." Aqua nodded. "Ai always reminded me of that innocence that Sarina had. Almost like there was a piece of her still alive within Ai. I guess I grew obsessed with Ai because she reminded me so much of Sarina's innocence and passion."

"And to lose Ai, would mean losing that one thing that connected you to Sarina." Raito concluded.

"You know... I never thought of that. But it feels like it makes sense." Aqua said. "Even Ruby reminds me a bit of Sarina, though that's normal since she's so obsessed with Ai that she imitates everything she does."

"Is that why you care for Ruby as well?" He asked. "Does she remind you of Sarina?"

"Not really." Aqua shrugged. "I love Ruby. She is basically my sister. But she's not much like Sarina. Sarina always was cheerful and kind around me. She was sweet and innocent. Ruby is a brat to me half the time and always makes trouble for me." Aqua chuckled. "Honestly, her being a brat is endearing."

"I see." Raito said. "Having love for family is normal, but you have an obsession over them for things outside of their control."

"What do you mean?" Aqua asked.

"You see Ai more of an extension of Sarina, instead of seeing Ai as her own person. I know you're technically an adult, but fact is that Ai is her own person. She's not Sarina and to obsess over her because of someone else can lead to unhealthy habits."

"Like saving her life?" Aqua asked.

"I won't fault that, after all, you are an adult. But to admit that you can't live without her is going too far." Raito said. "Before you were

reborn, Ai was just a patient. Maybe a friend, but for all intense and purposes, a patient that you treated. A stranger in some ways. There should be no need to end your life over that."

"And then when you were reborn, she is your mother. It must be hard for her to see you defend her so much when it is her job to do so. But even then, you still have that obsession with her that it can lead to self-destructive behaviors. Such as being prone to violence and even suicide. These are not normal reactions."

"I swore I'd protect her." Aqua said.

"And yet you admitted that you can't live without her." Raito said.

Aqua turned away.

"It's normal to grieve over people we lose and even to fear losing people we care for. But you can't have an obsession over someone to the point that you lose the will to live if they die. Fact is, life can be hard, and people die. People can die at random at any moment."

"But... I can't lose her." Aqua said.

"Tell me, if she died, what would you be more destroyed over. Ai's death, or the loss of the last thing that connects you to Sarina?"

Aqua had no answer.

"Do you think it's fair to hold Ai to a standard she could never be?" Raito asked. "She isn't Sarina. She has no connection to Sarina. It's not fair to base your life and obsession over something that she has no control over."

Raito noticed that Aqua placed his good hand over his face, trying to hold back tears. He began to struggle to breathe as he did.

"I just... I couldn't save Sarina." He said sadly. "I know I couldn't, it was out of my control. But still... I felt so useless. At least with Ai, I could keep a part of her alive."

"But she's not Sarina. As far as she and the rest of the world is concerned, she's your mother." He said.

"Yea, I know." Aqua said, holding back his tears.

"Listen Aqua. It's ok to feel these emotions. Emotions are at times impossible to control. But how you process them and how you react to them are well within your control. But before anything else, you have to learn the root cause of your emotions."

Can he feel emotions? He certainly felt sad. Sad about thinking about Sarina for the first time in years. Sad about how he thought about Ai and used her as a surrogate for the patient he lost.

"Can we stop." Aqua asked.

"Don't worry, we have many sessions over the next few months. We don't have to get into the heavier stuff now. We can stop for today. ." Raito said.

Aqua stood up and walked out of the room, wanting to get away from Raito until he could think clearly.

When he exited the room and saw Ai and Ruby sitting in the waiting room, Ai perked up. She saw the sad look on his face and got a little worried about him.

"Go ahead Ruby-Chan, your turn." She said, patting her daughters back to get moving.

"Ok mama." She said as she took Aqua's place in the room.

Ai was surprised that as soon as Ruby was in the room, Aqua walked over to her while she was seated. He almost collapsed in her arms and buried his head in her stomach, a clear sign that he was upset.

"Are you ok Aqua-Chan?" She asked softly.

Aqua nodded his head.

"Do you want to talk to mama about it?" Ai asked.

He shook his head no.

"Ok. Right now, we can just hug." Ai said as she lifted him up in her arms and held him carefully.

For the first time in a long time, Aqua felt sad. He felt exhausted and mentally drained after coming to terms with his thoughts on Ai. Raito was right, Aqua is just as obsessed with Ai as any other fan she had before the controversy.

The only difference was that Ai was a surrogate he unfairly created due to his failure to save Sarina. He became obsessed with the idea of Ai's innocence, an innocence that reminded him so much of Sarina. He never stopped to think about the person that was Ai and blindly tried to throw his life away for her.

He knew he'd still fight to protect her and Ruby, but he also knew that he needed to come to terms with his feelings and bury his obsession over saving his connection to Sarina.

Ai though, she was actually happy to see this change in Aqua. She felt like he was finally acting like a normal boy. A boy who was sad at the traumatic events that happened to him and processing his feelings.

She'd rather have him cry in her arms than to bottle it all up inside. At least this way, he can release that pent up sadness and be safe and warm in her arms. She was glad she did this and that he was going to be ok.

"Mama loves you Aqua-Chan." Ai said. "She always will."

Ten Years Later

Ruby woke up to see a pair of purple and green eyes looking at her-

"AH!" Ruby yelled as she jumped up into a sitting position.

"Wake up OneeChan." The young boy said.

"You scared me Kawachi." Ruby said.

"OkaaSan said to wake you up otherwise you'll be late for school."
He said as he turned around and went to Ruby's door.

Ruby sighed as he left the room.

In a lot of ways, Kawachi reminded her so much of her papa in terms of looks. He had jet black hair that was untamed half the time and his western and Asian features mixed in a way that was unique.

Though the main unique thing about him was his Heterochromia eyes. One eye, his left one, was purple like her mama's. While the other one was green like her papa's. Ai gushed over how beautiful they were when he was first born.

Although, his twin sister was much the same, though her eyes were reversed, with the left one being green.

The only current difference between him and his twin sister was that one eye had a bruise. He said he hit a door on Saturday at school and gave himself a black eye.

Yea, Ai had twins again. Something that caused the then five-year-old Ruby and Aqua a lot of confusion. They wondered if they were reborn as well, so they tested it.

"Ok Kawachi, Mikasa... are you two reborn?" Aqua asked the two infant babies in their playpens while Ai was doing the dishes.

"Yea, don't worry if you two are." Ruby said. "We're reborn too, so we'll understand."

Both babies didn't budge for a moment, looking confused. Though, their confusion didn't seem like the normal one of an older person. It was more of a blank stare that you'd expect from a baby.

"weeeh~" Kawachi started to tear up, causing Mikasa to tear up as well.

"Uh oh..." Aqua said.

"Waaaaahhhh!" Mikasa started wailing.

"Ruby, Aqua! Be nice to your baby brother and sister." Ai said as she walked over to the new borns to hopefully sooth them. "It's ok, mama's here. were your older siblings mean to you?"

"We were just talking." Aqua said.

"Told you mama doesn't have a magical womb." Ruby whispered in triumph.

"Can you please stop calling it that." Aqua said.

Yea, luckily both children were normal. At least as far as not being reborn, which was a relief to both Aqua and Ruby.

Though it wasn't a relief to Ai at all, since now she had to deal with real babies. She thought it was going to be easy since Ruby and Aqua were so easy. But she was in for a very rude surprise. As it turns out, real babies are very hard to care for.

Because Ai is always home, both children got upset anytime they were away from her. Even when they slept at night, Mikasa and Kawachi would constantly climb on her face or cry at night, making sleep impossible. Even when papa tried to sleep with them, both kids would crawl to Ai and rest on her face, waking her up.

It was the first time they ever saw an irritable Ai.

They're amazed Ai survived, though she still showed amazing patience and love to both children, no matter how hard it got to actually raise real babies.

Ruby stretched in her bed and yawned, trying to wake up since she had a big day today. She got out of bed and checked herself in the mirror. She was dressed in some comfy pajamas since she just woke up and her hair was a bit of a mess. She needed to hurry up and get herself presentable for today.

After a quick bath she dressed in her middle school outfit, a blue sailor fuku with a blue shirt, white collar, and black skirt. She took her school bag and put a change of clothes for her audition later in the day, which was a pair of white shorts and a black low-cut shirt.

Hopefully the idol agency will like it.

After that, Ruby went into the hallway to head downstairs. She could faintly smell salted salmon being cooked and was getting hungry.

"Oh, Aqua." She said, passing by her twin brother who was walking out of his room in his own middle school uniform.

"Ruby, you're smiling more often today." He noted.

"Of course, I have an audition today!" She said happily.

"So, the entrance exams are not on your mind at all?" He asked in a bored expression.

"Oh, please oniichan." She waved off. "Why would I need to study when I'll become an idol? No one cares about grades if the interview goes well."

"And if it doesn't?" Aqua asked.

"You worry too much." Ruby said. "After all, I'm mama's daughter. I'll be just fine."

Aqua sighed as his twin sister practically hopped her way down the stairs with a smile on her face. He was worried about her future if she decided to completely abandon her studies and pursue a career field that was a gamble at best.

Ruby knew her brother was always such a worry wart. He was different ever since they were kidnapped by those Yakuza guys. His normally stoic and serious attitude, while still there, was often replaced by a more gentle and calmer nature. He still came off as quiet and serious, but there was a softness to it.

Either way, she didn't care about him right now. Today she was going to audition to be an idol. today was all about her.

"Mama!" Ruby greeted her mother, who was placing the food on the table.

"Good morning, Ruby-Chan." she smiled, dressed in simple black shorts and a long sleeve V-neck shirt.

Even after ten years, her mama really didn't change at all. She still basically looked the same age, minus just the smallest hint of crow's feet on her eyes. Even though she was no longer an idol, she maintained her appearance as one. For years she still maintained her skin care routine, exercise, and makeup.

Ruby remembered she asked why she tried so hard to be beautiful even though she was no longer an idol.

"Because I still have my fans at home that need to see a pretty mama. If I suddenly stopped caring about my appearance, all of you would stop too. I need to be an example to my biggest fans. Plus, I want to look good forever for your papa."

Her hair was shorter though. She got it cut recently, which now reached down to her shoulders instead of down her back. Right now, it was loose, but the side was done in a side ponytail style.

Ai basically stayed a stay-at-home mom for the past ten years. For the first year after her and Eren married, Ai basically isolated herself in their new home in order to let the controversy die down and let people move on from the washed-up idol that was Ai.

However, Ai learned that she loved taking care of her children and no longer had the desire to work anymore. She wanted to spend every single day with her children and make as many memories as she could with them.

"Were's papa?" Ruby asked.

"Finishing up his morning workout in the garage." Ai said.

Eren maintained a high level of physical fitness, especially since he worked in an intelligence agency as of six years ago. He still had to be physically fit, though he still completely overshadowed his coworkers in every physical event they did, winning quiet a few workout matches at his work.

"Kawachi, button up your uniform jacket." Ai said to her youngest son in a sweet but firm tone.

Kawachi walked into the kitchen in his elementary school uniform, which had a jacket with buttons going all the way up to his neck in a navy styled way. Every single morning Ai had to remind him to button it up.

"I hate it okaasan." He said in a low voice. "It feels like it's choking me."

Ai's heart broke a little bit a year ago when he stopped calling her mama, though she also found it cute as well.

She never said it out loud, but the way Aqua acted, how he was always so mature and stoic, always unnerved her. It was almost like he was an adult sometimes and it made her uncomfortable sometimes. It just didn't feel right for a child to be so mature.

Kawachi on the other hand, he was exactly how she imagined a young boy to be. He started to see himself as a man and not a boy, believing that showing affection was something only little boys did, and he wanted to be more like his father. He still didn't understand that being a man didn't mean showing no affection, but he was a child and still needed to learn those lessons.

So, as much as she was sad to see him try to be a man, she found it cute and adorable that her baby boy was trying so hard to imitate his father. Even if he still doesn't fully understand what that means.

"Also, how did you get the bruise on your eye on Saturday again?" Ai asked in a stern and knowing voice.

"I just walked into a door as it was opening." He lied.

"Oh?" Ai asked. "So why do I have a meeting with your homeroom sensei about you getting into a fight with another student?"

Kawachi looked down a bit, annoyed that he got caught.

Ai exhaled in a bit of annoyance. Eren said Kawachi reminded him so much of himself at that age, always picking fights. Though it was hard since both of her youngest children had difficulties making friends at school.

Ai and Eren agreed when they were born to let both children keep the family name Hoshino instead of Yeager. This was to hopefully maintain their Japanese identity since mixed children often found themselves struggling to be accepted in Japan due to being mixed race. So Ai, Aqua, Ruby, Kawachi, and Mikasa still were named Hoshino.

Ai did get sad When Eren added one more reason.

"I wouldn't mind if the Yeager name died out."

She never asked him to elaborate.

"Kawachi." Ai knelt down in front of her nine-year-old son. "Please understand that I love you, but you need to learn to temper your anger."

"They were asking for it." Kawachi refused to look his mother in the eye.

Ai went to kiss her son on the top of his head, but since he was a "Man" now, he tried to back away from his mother's affection.

"No you don't!" Ai yelled out as she trapped Kawachi in a hug.

"Mama- Okaasan! Stop it!" He tried to escape her grasp as Ai relentlessly kissed him on the top of his head.

"Oh, you said mama!" She teased.

"Stop kissing me!" He yelled out, trying to escape, though Ai could hear a playfulness in his voice.

If there was one fun thing to having a son who tries to act like a man, it was that he was so easy to tease.

"Ok, get some food and get ready for school." Ai said. "And button up your jacket or I'll tell papa about your fight."

That got him to obey quick. The worst possible punishment for Kawachi was disappointing his father.

"Listen to okaasan." Aqua said as he entered the room as well, dressed in his middle school uniform.

"Tell me what?" Eren asked as he walked into the room, dressed in shorts, a workout shirt, and a flesh-colored belt around his waist.

Eren looked largely the same but a bit older. His once sculpted and defined muscles seemed softer after ten years of living a calm life. While he still was very strong and physically fit, a balanced and

nutritious diet that wasn't vegetable stew allowed him to have a very small layer of fat that made his definition go down.

Granted, he was still muscular and defined, but not as much as before.

Though recently he started growing a beard, which was always cut very short and made him look a bit older, especially with his long hair swept back or in a bun.

Eren still had a heavy accent, but he was able to speak, read, and comprehend Japanese well enough to be understood. It took him almost a year or two, but he had the same level of comprehension as a native speaker, but just with a thick western accent.

"Nothing darin." Ai waved off his question. "By the way, have you seen Mika-Chan?" Ai asked.

Eren turned his body slight, and now that she was looking at Eren, she realized he wasn't wearing a belt.

On his back, with her arms wrapped around his waist, was their youngest daughter holding onto Eren upside down in her school uniform. Her skirt was falling over her hips and her legs dangled away from Eren's back. She looked at her mother and gave her the biggest open mouth smile she could.

She was very small and thin since she ran around all the time. Her long brown hair was almost always unkept and Ai had to struggle to style it since she'd always mess it up.

Ai was so glad that her school mandated that girls her age wear shorts under their skirts, otherwise her panties would be in full view. Especially when all she likes to do is explore and climb things, never taking into consideration that she's wearing a skirt.

Ai now practically mandates her to wear shorts under her skirt because of her explorative nature.

"Why is she upside down?" Ai asked.

"I was doing upside down sit ups on the bar. She latched on when I went down and won't let go." Eren said. "Can you get her off me."

Ai giggled at the display. Mika-Chan loved her papa and always annoyed him when he was home. Something Eren joked about but loved none the less.

Ai grabbed Mikasa's dangling legs and lowered her gently to the ground, allowing her to right herself and stand up. She smoothed out her uniform for a moment before smiling at Ai.

"Thank's mama." She said happily. "Can we eat now?"

"Yup." Ai nodded. "Go get a seat."

"Ok!" She held up a peace sign and ran over to her seat.

When the new twins were born, Eren and Ai discussed on what they wanted to name them. Eren wanted to honor his friends by naming them Mikasa and Armin, something that kind of upset Ai.

They decided not to name the boy Armin since Ai was worried about bullying, so they kept it as a Japanese name. With their dual-colored eyes, she couldn't think of a good name like she did Aqua and Ruby, so she more or less chose a name at random.

Mikasa though was different. She was upset at Eren mentioning his old love. In Japanese culture, you never bring up previous relationship in normal conversation. It's seen as disrespectful and rude to the person you're with.

However, Ai suppressed those feelings since as far as she knew, Mikasa was gone, and it would be unfair of her to get mad at Eren for still caring for Mikasa.

And since Mikasa was a common Japanese name, Ai agreed to the name. She was still a bit upset for a few days but knew that she was

being unfair and simply let go of those feelings.

"I'll take my meal to go." Eren said. "I need to get ready."

"Ok darin." Ai said.

Around the dinner table, Ai and her children all talked about random things they were going to do for the week. Aqua wanted to get his entrance exams over with and refresh on his knowledge before taking it.

Kawachi wanted to watch some MMA fight, apparently there was a junior international league, and he was cheering for some German fighter named Sulze or something.

She remembered he saw his father practicing UFC styled moves with his older brother and instantly fell in love with the sport. He asked Eren to show him but Eren shook his head and wanted to wait till he was a bit older before teaching him to really fight. Especially with how worried Eren felt at teaching him.

"Until you learn to not pick every fight, I won't teach you."

Ai knew Eren was worried about how similar Kawachi was to him and was scared that he would go down the same road as he did.

"I'm scared Ai. Kawachi shows the same kind of aggression and desire to fight as I did at that age. I'm worried what would happen if he never learns to control his anger."

"Well, that's why it's best if he learns from you. He needs your example and guidance. I think you worry too much."

Eren agreed, but he still wanted to wait. A decision that upset Kawachi, but he'd never show any kind of disrespect to the man he looked up to so much.

Mikasa was a sweet little girl. She was an explorer at heart and loved to cosplay, watch animated shows, and play video games.

Unlike her brother she was shy and did have a bit of social anxiety, but when she got used to people, she was the happiest little girl Ai ever saw.

"Are you sure that's what you want Ruby-Chan?" Ai asked.

"Yes mama. I want to be an idol like you." Ruby said with determination.

"It will be hard." Ai said. "Afterall, you saw what happened to my career."

"Well, all I have to do is avoid boys and dates and I'll be fine." Ruby waved her concerns off.

"Don't be so quick to abandon any chances of being happy with someone Ruby." Ai said.

"I'll have plenty of time after my career mama." Ruby said. "I won't need to date. I'll make sure to remain dateless and pure to avoid any controversies."

"It's not just that Ruby." Ai said. "There are many ways you can be hurt in a business like being an idol."

"I know mama, but I still want to." She said.

"Ok." Ai said. "But when you get picked, I'll help you avoid my mistakes."

After their meal it was time for them all to leave for school.

The family, to include Eren walked over to the door and began putting their shoes on. Eren was dressed in his normal black suit and tie for work, though his tie was still loose.

"One moment darin." Ai said.

Ai walked over to Eren and tightened his tie for him, making sure he looked professional.

"Careful." Eren said. "I hate how this thing chokes me sometimes." He said.

"Don't be a baby." Ai giggled.

Eren knelt down and gave Ai a kiss on her cheek.

"Itai!" Ai yelled out as his kiss made contact.

Ai reached up to his face and tried to grab his beard, though it was too short to get a grip and only ended up slightly annoying Eren.

"I hate beard." She said in an aggressive but joking tone.

Eren chuckled a bit but stepped back to get his shoes on.

"Ok, Mika-Chan first." Ai said.

"Ok mama." She said.

Mikasa went up to Ai. Since Ai was so short, her daughter already came up to her neck. Ai continued her tradition of kissing her children before they left for school, so she kissed her daughter on the top of her head.

Then there was Kawachi, who scowled and blushed as Ai kissed him, but Ai could tell he did love her. He just still had that dumb idea of machoism that many young boys had.

Ruby was tricky since she had to bend over so Ai could kiss her. Ruby was taller than her mother now, a fact that made Ai so sad. She can't pick her up any more like she used to when they were kids.

Lastly was Aqua, who because he was so tall, Ai had to slide out a small footstool she kept near the door just to get high enough.

However...

"Aqua-Chan, you're taller!" She yelled out. "Stop getting so tall! How am I supposed to kiss you!?"

Aqua just sighed.

"Bend down so I can reach!" Ai said.

Aqua bent down so his mother could kiss the top of his head. Ai told herself that she needed to buy a larger foot stool since he's almost as tall as Eren now.

"You done?" Eren asked.

"Be patient, I'm kissing my baby's goodbye."

"They'll literally be back this afternoon, Ai." He said. "Same as every single day."

"Ignore papa." Ai said. "He's being mean."

"All these years, you still act like an idol." He said.

"Of course." Ai smiled and held up a peace sign.

Aqua assumed that Ai's idol personality almost became a part of her actual self in some way. You don't live a lie for eight years without it leaving some kind of habit that's impossible to get rid of. So even though she hasn't been an idol in ten years, Ai still very much acts like one.

"Mama, we're heading out now." Ruby said to the picture of Ai she always kept near the door.

"Ruby-Chan, I'm over hear." Ai said.

"Huh?" Ruby asked, turning to her mother.

Wait, where was the picture?

"Goodbye Ruby. Goodluck at your audition." Ai smiled, giving her daughter one more kiss.

"Thanks mama." Ruby said.

Ruby looked back to where the picture should be... but there was no picture. There never was one. Why did she think there was a picture? The only thing there was the shoe rack.

She must be tired. Regardless, her papa went out the door, followed by all the kids as they all began their walk to school. Ai waved goodbye to her family and mentally began thinking of what food she'd prepare for them when they got home.

Ruby was excited to finally start her new chapter in her life as an idol. Just wait and see.

It's a really surreal moment to finally finish this story.

Also, AoT ended. I am sad, but man, what a conclusion. MAPPA did amazing things with that animation.

But, it's finally done. Now onto the sequel.

Some interesting things, Kawachi was a post-dreadnaught era battleship in the IJN, which contrasts to the Mikasa which was a pre-dreadnaught battleship. I thought it would be fitting lol.

Now, for the sequel. When I write stories, I typically follow the butterfly effect concept. Theoretically, since Aqua is now going to be a different person, he has no need to become an actor. Thus, he should never meet Mem-cho and she'd never join B-Komachi, and he'd never meet Akane and she would sadly commit suicide.

Obviously, most people wouldn't like that, so for the sake of following the original story in some aspects, I'll be intentionally doing things that realistically wouldn't happen lol. So, to keep the original characters from OnK apart of the story, some things will need to happen as they did in the Anime, even if it doesn't entirely make sense.

Also, since Aqua finally got therapy, he'll be a very different character. While not entirely different in many ways, he'll act and be different. Probably still serious, but not entirely the way he was. This isn't a criticism towards the original anime but a necessity since his character has to change.

I'm nervous on doing a sequel, but I want to thank everyone for sticking with me through the story and I really hope you guys enjoyed. Thank you for your praise and criticism and for helping me be a better writer.

Please enjoy.

New Story Published

New Story Published

Thanks again everyone who stayed with me throughout A Second Chance. The new story is published so please check it out when you want to.